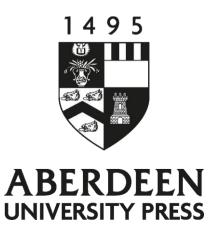*Journal of*
Irish and Scottish Studies

Articles

Problems with Religion as Identity: The Case of Mid-Stuart Ireland and Scotland

Author: Scott Spurlock

1 4 9 5

ABERDEEN
UNIVERSITY PRESS

Problems with Religion as Identity:
The Case of Mid-Stuart Ireland and Scotland

Scott Spurlock

Defining what component elements are integral in defining identity, either individual or corporate, is always challenging. Identity within a social grouping is multi-layered, dynamic and exists as part of a continuum that is affected by competition from within the collective and externally.[1] Moreover, identities can be multiple and alternating. Therefore the essential act of defining the key elements that delineate an identity for a collective, thus allowing a group to be distinguished and labelled, at any particular point in time is difficult. This is still more challenging for the historian who is chronologically and conceptually removed from her/his subject and who must discern between the voices of primary sources and the traditions that have formed long after. Even when self-defining terms can be taken directly from a person or people in the distant past, it is dangerous to assume that the meaning remains the same for the modern mind as it did for those who espoused the label, for their meanings and usage can change even in short periods of time.[2] For this reason it is important for historians to return to the rubrics of identity we have inherited in historiography and scrutinise the meaning, accuracy and usability of the categories of identity that have been constructed.

Identity has been a particularly challenging and ongoing topic of debate for historians of Ireland. There are inherent difficulties in identifying successive waves of immigration into Ireland and charting their various influences on the formation of an increasingly amalgamated community. This is challenging when the identities of both the incomer and the indigenous are themselves already composite. Though long-established terms, historians of Ireland continue to grapple with defining the labels of 'Anglo-Irish' or 'Old English' and 'New English'. The purpose of this essay is not to return to this well-trodden debate. Instead, one component of identity that historians have tended to turn to as the lowest common denominator to delineate the peoples of Ireland from the mid-sixteenth century onwards will be reassessed. Like so

---

[1] Peter J. Burke and Jan E. Stets, *Identity Theory* (Oxford, 2009), 61–88.

[2] Peter Bull, 'Shifting Patterns of Social Identity in Northern Ireland', *The Psychologist* 19 (2006), 40–43.

many other approaches, the oversimplification of religious identity to broad confessional umbrellas has essential shortcomings. And yet, as this paper will discuss, Irish history is not alone in this trend. In Scottish history as well, religious labels have been employed with too little scrutiny, with the result that diverse religious, social and political motivations become lumped into overly homogenised definitions.

Making Sense of Catholicism in Ireland

Although many popular histories of Ireland emphasise the religious and cultural impact of the Tudor period, the introduction of religious reform—for imperial motives—is not unique to sixteenth-century Ireland. The invasion, settlement and integration of Vikings in Ireland from the ninth century had significant cultural and ecclesiastical implications.[3] Similarly, the arrival of English to Ireland began nearly 400 years before the reign of Henry VIII, hence the proliferation of labels for the various inhabitants of the island. As historians of medieval Ireland emphasise, Henry II's intervention in the twelfth century was also fundamentally rooted in religious terminology and given sanction by the English pope Adrian IV's *Laudabiliter* (1155). Although the authenticity of the document continues to be disputed, England justified intervention in Ireland on religious grounds with the result that rival Gaelic- and English-speaking Catholic traditions divided Irish Christians in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries perhaps even more profoundly than the gradual and erratic implementation of Protestantism after Henry VIII's 1537 Act of Supremacy. Tensions ran so high between Irish- and English-speaking Franciscans in Cork that blood was purportedly shed in 1291.[4] The cultural divisions between Gaelic Irish and Anglo-Irish were further cemented politically by their diverging responses to Edward Bruce's invasion in 1315, the repressive Statutes of Kilkenny (1366) and the Gaelic Resurgence between 1350 and 1500. Even the groundswell of monastic reform in the fifteenth century that witnessed the founding of more than forty Franciscan houses was largely limited to Irish-speaking regions.[5] This division between Gaelic and Anglo-Irish Catholics persisted down to the middle of the seventeenth

---

[3] Benjamin T. Hudson, *Viking Pirates and Christian Princes* (Oxford, 2005).
[4] John A. Watt, 'The Irish Church in the Middle Ages' in Brendan Bradshaw and Dáire Keogh (eds), *Christianity in Ireland: Revisiting the Story* (Dublin, 2002), 54.
[5] Patrick J. Corish, *The Irish Catholic Experience: A Historical Survey* (Dublin, 1985), 56–57.

century.[6] By the end of the fifteenth century this resulted, according to Patrick Corish, in the 'churches … already falling into disrepair and even into total ruin in the "land of so long continual war within himself"'.[7]

The question this article is concerned with is the degree to which Catholicism in Ireland can be viewed as a unified and uniform religion during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Much work has been done since John Bossy's groundbreaking essay 'The Counter-Reformation and the People of Catholic Ireland, 1596–1641'[8]–particularly by Colm Lennon, who argues for the formation of an Irish Catholic identity in Ireland in the 1570s and 1580s–but the issue remains that the state of Catholicism in Ireland by the end of the sixteenth century was far from standardised. In the early years of the Reformation the religious persuasion of most people could be described as indifferent in relation to the pull from either the Protestant or Catholic direction prior to 1590.[9] In fact, when Edmund Tanner famously wrote to Rome in 1571 he expressed little fear about the threat of Protestant heresy, claiming less than 100 Irish had embraced the new religion. Instead he decried the state of the Catholic faith:

> a pious Catholic is hardly to be found: and no wonder since the clergy are the most depraved of all. Moreover, there is so little instruction to be had in the Christian faith that few can so much as repeat the Lord's Prayer, the articles of the faith, or the commandments, and still fewer understand them. Sermons are so uncommon that there are many that have never so much as heard one; the sacraments are so rarely administered, so much more rarely understood, that the ignorant people know not whether they were appointed by God or by men. In fine, so gross is the ignorance of the people that there are many who, passing all their lives in the grossest sin, have grown so accustomed thereto that they dare to say that it is just as lawful for them to live by theft or rapine as for him that worthily serves the altar to live by the altar.[10]

[6] G.. Aiazza (ed.), *The Embassy in Ireland of Monsignor G.. B. Rinuccini, Archbishop of Fermo, in the Years 1645–1649*, Annie Hutton (trans.) (Dublin, 1873), 485–487.

[7] Corish, *The Irish Catholic Experience*, 62.

[8] John Bossy, 'The Counter-Reformation and the People of Catholic Ireland, 1596–1641', *Historical Studies* 8 (1971), 155–169.

[9] Alan Ford, *The Protestant Reformation in Ireland, 1590–1641* (Frankfurt, 1987), 15.

[10] J. M. Rigg (ed.), 'Rome: 1571, September-October', *Calendar of State Papers Relating to English Affairs in the Vatican Archives*, Volume 1: 1558–1571, British History Online, http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=92559 [accessed 4 February

In light of so scathing a report, how Catholic should Ireland be considered by the middle of the sixteenth century? And, as a corollary of this important question, how appropriate is it for religion to serve as the primary attribute for demarcating identity? Marianne Elliott's assessment that the popular religion in Ulster in the sixteenth century 'was mostly one of localised folk practices', similar to much or Europe, makes the assertion that religion should be the primary marker of identity seem implausible.[11] Elliott does not doubt that religion was fundamentally rooted in Gaelic culture, but the influence of local politics and the lack of a formal structure meant religion reflected cultural identity rather than serving to define it.[12]

Despite Patrick Corish's claim in 1985 that conflict in early-modern Ireland – once accepted as rooted 'essentially, indeed almost exclusively', in religion had rightly come to be 'seen as a much broader clash of cultures', religion persists in being the primary marker of identity not simply in popular memory, but in much of the scholarship as well.[13] Such a distinction is evidenced even in Aidan Clarke's highly nuanced *The Old English in Ireland* (1966, 2000). Here Clarke argues that the criteria for being 'Old English' was 'demographic, historical and racial, its connotation was political and religious' – meaning Catholic – which led to the 'possession of a certain politico-religious attitude'.[14] David Edwards interprets this to mean that 'religion, not ethnicity, determined political identity'.[15] However, Edwards notes that such a distinction meant Clarke treats 'the Irish-born and bred twelfth earl of Ormond, James Butler', a Confederate, 'as one of the "New English" because of his Protestantism, and the English-based fifth earl of Clanricarde, Ulick Burke, as "Old English" because of his Catholicism' despite the facts that Clanricarde had primarily royalist motivations, had sided with Ormond against the Catholic Confederacy during the 1640s, and allied with Murrough McDermod O'Brien, first earl of Inchiquin, in 1648 and besieged Galway.[16] Inchiquin himself then provides a very difficult test for distinguishing individuals based on their 'possession of a certain politico-religious attitude' for he was an O'Brien, of Gaelic stock,

---

2012].

[11] Marianne Elliott*, The Catholics of Ulster: A History* (New York, 2001), 66.

[12] Ibid., 67.

[13] Corish, *The Irish Catholic Experience*, 262.

[14] Aidan Clarke, *The Old English in Ireland, 1625 – 42* (Ithaca 1966, Dublin, 2000), 16.

[15] David Edwards, 'A Haven of Popery: English Catholic Migration to Ireland in the Age of Plantations' in Alan Ford and John McCafferty (eds), *The Origins of Sectarianism in Early Modern Ireland* (Cambridge, 2006), 100.

[16] Ibid., 100n; Clarke, *Old English in Ireland,* 16.

but had been fostered in his youth by Protestants. He converted to the 'new' faith between 1628 and 1635. Although he served the Confederate cause (as a royalist) after fleeing Ireland he eased himself into Spanish service and by 1654 was governor of Catalonia and returned to the 'old' faith by 1657.[17] The problem, as evidenced here, is that the apparently simple rubric of Catholic or Protestant is far too simplistic to explain the shifting milieu of motivations directing personal choice and actually clouds a number of the issues at hand. This is especially the case when a number of settlers, both before and during the official plantations, were Catholic. The 1st and 2nd earls of Antrim fostered Catholicism and planted Catholics on their lands, while also planting Protestants in order to appease the State. Other Catholics in the early seventeenth century, including Sir George Hamilton of Greenlaw, also attracted Catholic Scots to settle in Ulster.[18] Perhaps as many as one in five Scots settling in Ulster by 1625 was Catholic.[19] Thus the simplicity of the claim that 'in Ireland religion was the criterion used to distinguish between natives and newcomers' in the seventeenth century must be questioned.[20]

Catholicism and Politics

Certainly there were occasions during the latter half of the sixteenth century when clearly Catholic ideologies were hitched to political aspirations, such as in the Desmond rebellions (1569–73, 1579–83), the Baltinglass Rebellion (1580–1), and even the early years of the Nine Years War (1594–1603). Yet these had only localised appeal and did not necessarily even carry the argument to such a degree as to demand participation of all Catholics. When, in 1572, Irish friars emerged from hiding and openly preached a Catholic crusade against English oppression it failed to elicit a general rebellion.[21]

---

[17] Patrick Little, 'O'Brien, Murrough, first earl of Inchiquin (*c.*1614–1674)' in Lawrence Goldman (ed.), *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, online ed: http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/20463 [accessed 4 February 2012].

[18] Edwards, 'A Haven of Popery', 95–126; Elliott, *Catholics of Ulster*, 128; Perceval-Maxwell, *Scottish Migration to Ulster* (London, 1973), 272–273; *Calendar of State Papers Relating to Ireland, of the Reign of Charles I, 1625–32*, Robert Mahaffy (ed.) (London, 1900), 512–513.

[19] J. Michael Hill, 'The Origins of Scottish Plantations in Ulster to 1625: A Reinterpretation', *Journal of British Studies,* 32 (1993), 32, 40.

[20] Brendan Bradshaw, 'Ambiguous Allegiances', *Irish Review,* 33 (2005), 117.

[21] Fitzwilliam to Elizabeth I, 7 December 1572, *Calendar of State Papers Relating to Ireland, 1509–73*, Hans Claude Hamilton (ed.) (London, 1860), 490; Mary Ann Lyons,

Therefore, although a militant form of political Catholicism espousing 'faith and fatherland' developed in the 1570s, it remained marginal.[22] For example, Gerald Fitzgerald, the 11th earl of Kildare, who had a Crusader-esque pedigree having fought for the Knights of Rhodes against the Turks and played a prominent role in suppressing the Protestant-led Wyatt's rebellion that opposed the marriage of the Catholic Mary Tudor to Philip II of Spain, failed to be convinced in 1579–80 of the necessity to fight for 'faith and fatherland' in Desmond's second rebellion.[23] For Hiram Morgan the origins of linking Catholicism and Irishness in terms of 'faith and fatherland' rest with the return of James Fitzmaurice from the continent in 1579.[24] Yet, as late as 1599 the appeals of Hugh O'Neill and 'Red Hugh' O'Donnell for a united Catholic response to English policies threatening Gaelic Ulster fell on deaf ears. This lacklustre reaction is all the more striking when the monarch, Elizabeth I, had been excommunicated by the Pope in 1570. In order to further his cause as a Catholic one O'Neill desired the Pope to excommunicate all who failed to support his rebellion. Rome, however, doubted such a move would strengthen the position of the faith in Ireland or ease relations with the English monarchy.[25] If general dissatisfaction could not be harnessed under the banner of Catholicism in such circumstances, identity and actions appear not to have been primarily motivated by confessional interests. In fact, Catholicism was by no means the exclusive preserve of the 'Old English' and Gaels of Ireland in the 1580s. David Edwards notes Hugh O'Neill and his great rival Sir Henry Bagenal were both Catholics. Moreover, the majority of the troops Bagenal levied in England for Irish service were also Catholic.[26] In the 1580s and early 1590s to be Irish did not necessarily mean to be first and foremost a Catholic, nor did being devoutly Catholic indicate Irish-ness. Furthermore, Catholicism

Franco-Irish Relations, 1500–1610: Politics, Migration and Trade, Studies in History (Woodbridge, 2003), 138.

[22] Brendan Bradshaw, *The Irish Constitutional Revolution of the Sixteenth Century* (Cambridge, 1979), 287–8.

[23] Bradshaw, 'Ambiguous Allegiances', 112.

[24] Hiram Morgan, 'Hugh O'Neill and the Nine Years War in Tudor Ireland', *The Historical Journal,* 36.1 (1993), 23; idem, 'Faith and Fatherland or Queen and Country? An Unpublished Exchange between O'Neill and the State at the Height of the Nine Years War', *Dúiche Néill: Journal of the O'Neill Country Historical Society,* 9 (1994), 1–49.

[25] Morgan, 'Hugh O'Neill', 32.

[26] Edwards, 'A Haven of Popery', 101; John McGurk, *The Elizabethan Conquest of Ireland: The Irish Privy Council and the Expansion of Tudor Rule, 1556–1578* (Dublin, 1993); Nicholas Canny, *Making Ireland British 1580–1650* (Oxford, 2001), 79–82; Hiram Morgan, *Tyrone's Rebellion: The Outbreak of the Nine Years War in Tudor Ireland* (Dublin, 1993).

did not equate to a sense of belonging to a universal church in general, nor a specifically Roman one in particular.[27]

The Process of Confessionalisation

So far, the purpose of the argument has not been to question the presence of Catholicism in Ireland; forms of Catholicism were certainly widespread. The issue is whether these forms of Catholicism were in any way uniform, overarching or capable of serving as the bedrock of identity. Tadhg Ó hAnnracháin claims that: 'to the present century no one factor was more influential in distinguishing and dividing the histories of the two islands than the (in archipelago terms) localized success of the post-tridentine Irish catholic church'.[28] This may be true, but when this transformation took place is as yet undetermined. For Sean Connolly, clear cut confessional identities took root before the 1590s as the result of 'ethnic and political conflicts within Ireland, rather than of the importation to there of the competing religious ideologies of continental Europe.' However, only after the initiation of the Jesuit mission in 1596 and the introduction of a continental seminary-trained clergy did a Catholic conformity begin to be instilled in Ireland. For Connolly the primary purpose of the Irish Counter-Reformation was 'concerned less with the combating of heresy than with reshaping indigenous religious traditions to conform to the new model laid down at Trent'.[29] This is important, particularly in relation to the political dynamics of the Irish diaspora at the end of the sixteenth century.

The process identified by Connolly enabled the formation of what Hiram Morgan has called a conception of 'faith and fatherland'.[30] While appeals to such an idea were made by Hugh O'Neill and Hugh O'Donnell in the mid-1590s, faith and fatherland failed to motivate much of a response. Perhaps the cold response by O'Neill and O'Donnell's neighbours in Ulster, as Ciaran Brady has suggested, is because such appeals were hitched to Hugh O'Neill's ambitions to extend personal dominance over the very people he was trying to summon together in the name of religion. For Brady 'the aggressive,

---

[27] Elliott, *Catholics of Ulster*, 66.

[28] Tadhg Ó hAnnracháin, *Catholic Reformation in Ireland: The Mission of Rinuccini, 1645–1649* (Oxford, 2002), 3.

[29] Sean Connolly, *Contested Island: Ireland 1460–1630* (Oxford, 2009), 337.

[30] Hiram Morgan, 'Faith & Fatherland in Sixteenth-Century Ireland', *History Ireland*, 3 (1995), 13–20.

opportunist and frankly oppressive tactics which he employed against the other Gaelic lordships [were not] readily reconcilable with the image of the great defender of faith and fatherland which other commentators have sought to project upon him'.[31] While the debate about O'Neill's motives continues, Marianne Elliott notes 'even the pope doubted O'Neill's sincerity'.[32] Yet the basic ideas promoted by O'Neill and ignored by his most of his audience came to be reformulated and reintroduced into Ireland decades later. This process of reformulation did not take place in Ireland. Instead, it was an identity forged in the Irish experience of exile in Spanish regiments and continental seminaries. However, this expatriate influence on Ireland would take several decades to bear fruit at home and would not take root until the circumstances had become even more difficult, particularly for Irish Gaels.

Structurally the great change for the Catholic church in Ireland took place between 1618 and 1648 with the reintroduction of a diocesan system. Tadhg Ó hAnnracháin, following in the steps of Patrick Corish, asserts the reestablishment of 'a functioning Catholic episcopate [in 1630] in a kingdom where the state was Protestant was…a European anomaly'.[33] However, two qualifications about Ó hAnnracháin's assertion need to be made. First, although the period between 1618 and 1648 witnessed a dramatic series of episcopal appointments with forty provisions being made and the residency of twenty-seven bishops by 1648, Donal Cregan reminds us that this needs to 'be regarded as an isolated group of bishops virtually without immediate predecessors or immediate successors'.[34] In other words, this period was an anomaly in Ireland as well. Moreover, the introduction of an episcopal hierarchy without a well-trained clergy at the parish level meant little in terms of implementing Catholic education and presumably Catholic identity among rank-and-file Irish men and women. It was for this reason that Caroline Hibbard, when writing about the re-establishment of the Catholic hierarchy between 1618 and 1630, implies it had little impact prior to the political changes

---

[31] Ciaran Brady, 'The Macdonalds and the Provincial Strategies of Hugh O'Neill' in William Kelly and John Young (eds), *Scotland and the Ulster Plantations* (Dublin, 2009), 57.

[32] Elliott, *Catholics of Ulster*, 59.

[33] Tadhg Ó hAnnracháin, 'In Imitation of that Holy Patron of Prelates the Blessed St Charles': Episcopal Activity in Ireland and the Formation of a Confessional Identity, 1618' in Ford and McCafferty (eds), *The Origins of Sectarianism*, 74.

[34] Donal F. Cregan, 'The Social and Cultural Background of a Counter-Reformation Episcopate, 1618–60' in Art Cosgrove and Donal McCartney (eds), *Studies in Irish History* (Dublin, 1979), 86.

brought about by the establishment of the Catholic Confederacy allowed for a groundswell of support.[35] This may be in part due to two facts. First, even if it is accepted that a functioning ecclesiastical structure had been restored by 1630, its influence was, to a significant extent, limited to Anglo-Irish regions.[36] Second, not all of the bishops in office in Ireland were of equal quality. The nuncio Giovanni Battista Rinuccini noted a distinct difference in the ability of Ireland's bishops, with the older bishops being of a much inferior calibre to those most recently appointed.[37]

The second qualification to Ó hAnnracháin's argument is that the introduction of a functioning episcopal hierarchy from abroad is not an indication of the state of Catholicism in 1618. In other words, the question remains as to whether the flurry of structural change resulted from an inherent desire in Ireland for a Catholic clergy to attend to a predominantly Catholic society or was this an external attempt to bring about a significant cultural change as Connolly suggested for the 1590s? The answer is probably both, but it leads to a corollary. Despite Ó hAnnracháin's claim that the situation in Ireland was almost unique in Europe because the bishops appointed 'were all the product of seminary education' and 'had been appointed … with little input from any secular interest',[38] Cregan gives ample evidence for lay political motivations and numerous examples of kin interventions or attempted interventions in episcopal appointments. For instance, Tyrconnell's interest in facilitating episcopal appointments while in exile in 1628 included the extension of O'Donnell influence in northern Connacht as well as '"poaching" on former O'Neill territory, in the diocese of Derry, whose inhabitants he described as "my subjects".'[39] Jesuits regularly complained of secular intervention in the appointment of Irish bishops intended to maintain the status quo of kin influence over a church dependent on friars supported by those very kin groups.[40] Moreover, there are numerous instances where moves were made to block appointments due to family links that might be unfavourable to kin

[35] Caroline M. Hibbard, 'Early Stuart Catholicism: Revisions and Re-Revisions', *Journal of Modern History,* 52 (1980), 27.

[36] Elliott, *Catholics of Ulster*, 68.

[37] Aiazza (ed.), *The Embassy in Ireland,* 141.

[38] Tadhg Ó hAnnracháin, 'Conflicting Loyalties, Conflicted Rebels: Political and Religious Allegiance among the Confederate Catholics of Ireland', *English Historical Review,* 119 (2004), 851.

[39] Cregan, 'The Cultural and Social Background', 89.

[40] Elliot, *Catholics of Ireland*, 71–2; J. Hagan (ed.), 'Miscelanea Vaticano-Hibernica, 1580–1631', *Archivium Hibernicum*, 3 (1914), 284.

aims and ambitions.[41] Thus the appointments reflected, and to some degree embodied, a desire for creating a Catholic patria formulated and incubated by an exiled Irish community. Yet could the presence of a fully formed episcopal structure, imported from abroad, attain the homogenisation of Catholicism in the generation and a half between 1618 and 1648? Again, it might be argued the answer is probably yes and no.

Scholars generally accept that this late-blooming post-tridentine reform had a limited impact. For Ó hAnnracháin, 'the impact of Catholic reformers in Ireland is to be measured less by the extent to which they managed to substitute popular religious practices with the devotions of the educated élite than in the manner in which they acquired popular legitimacy as a professional clerical body mediating between the people and God'.[42] Real grassroots change could not be introduced immediately. Ó hAnnracháin goes on to say: 'From an Irish perspective, however, rather than representing the tail-end of a period of reform, this was an era of dynamic religious innovation which telescoped together a number of developments that occurred more gradually in less peripheral parts of the Catholic world.'[43] However, the dynamic process coalescing in the remarkable creation of an autonomous Irish nation in the Catholic Confederation of Ireland in 1642, also served to antagonise and expose the inherent weaknesses and incompatibilities in Irish society. The combination of commitments proved to be problematic and largely foreign to many Irish minds, as the Catholic clergy emerged as 'a formidable and distinctive interest during the 1640s … [at a time] when the question of their corporate right to jurisdiction and property became the burning political issue within the Confederate association.'[44] This is especially important when the party that primarily directed this process for developing a Catholic patria represented the intellectual fruits of exiled Gaeldom. Perhaps the clearest indication of the fragmented nature of Catholicism is evidenced at the time when it has often been presented as being most triumphant. The establishing of the Confederation and its tripartite commitments to faith, king and country brought pressures and expectations that could not be reconciled corporately.

While Ó hAnnracháin admits that continental interest in events in Ireland ultimately testified 'more to the limitations of a confessional solidarity than to its strengths', it might be argued that the same could be said of the domestic

---

[41] Cregan, 'The Cultural and Social Background', 90–91.

[42] Ó hAnnracháin, *Catholic Reformation in Ireland*, 10.

[43] Ibid., 3.

[44] Ibid., 11.

situation.[45] For as Brendan Fitzpatrick explained the situation in 1647, it was loyalty to the monarch and not Catholicism that 'had been the one thing' the confederates had been able to agree upon.[46] Even in the wake of the confederacy's implosion, the previous divisions among Catholicism in Ireland remained: the 'Old English kept to their diocesan Counter-Reformation structure, while the Gaelic Irish supported their regular, unreformed clergy, best represented by the Franciscan Friars Minor.'[47] In fact, even during the height of Catholic power during Rinuccini's presence in Ireland, he reported that the bishops tended to be 'for the most part lukewarm' in attaining a complete Catholic settlement, while those in regular orders 'are without comparison much more so' apathetic.[48]

According to Rinuccini, the root of their error likely rested in 'the ample power vested till now in the Regulars, under the title of Missionaries, which equals and in some respects exceeds that of Apostolic Nuncio'.[49] Thus it may be argued that the intellectual formation of a Catholic patria, having been formulated by dissatisfied Gaelic élites and codified by the Gaelic bardic intelligentsia educated in continental colleges at its root could not hold together the disparate interests of the Confederacy's constituent parts, for they had fundamentally different aims that the nominal homogeneity of the confederated Catholics could not smooth over.[50] Yet a meta-narrative was created during the failed Confederacy, even if it only contained a selective interpretation of Catholicism in Ireland.

The role that religion played in political revolts prior to 1603 was recast by the subsequent appropriation of political rebels as Catholic martyrs in works such as David Rothe's *Analecta Sacra* (1616–19), Thomas Messingham's *Florilegium Insulae Sanctorum* (1624), Archbishop Lombard of Armagh's *De regno Hibernia, sancta insula, commentarius* (1632), and Philip O'Sullivan Beare's *Historiae Catholicae Iberniae Compendium* (1621). This reconstruction, or perhaps overestimation of a consistent Catholic lineage for Ireland, found another voice in the Franciscan proliferation of a bardic 'Clann Israel' tradition that identified exiles as God's chosen wandering in the wilderness with a promise to return home. Jerrold Casway helps bring this picture into fuller focus by emphasising that the formulation of the Kilkenny 'experiment' provided 'a

---

[45] Ibid., 8.

[46] Brendan Fitzpatrick, *Seventeenth-Century Ireland: The War of Religions* (Dublin, 1988), 200.

[47] Ibid., 203.

[48] Aiazza (ed.), *The Embassy in Ireland*, 141–142.

[49] Ibid., 142.

[50] Morgan, 'Faith and Fatherland', 16.

forum and opportunity for a provincial-minded and religious society to create a Catholic *patria*'.[51] It was not only a new context but a new 'identity' forged over the previous twenty years through the concerted external efforts of exiles, ecclesiastics and half-hearted international supporters. Moreover, it perhaps owed as much to the policies of the Spanish crown as it did to Irishmen, as the king founded and funded a number of Irish colleges: Alcalá, Evora and Lisbon (1593); Douai (1594); Antwerp (1600); Santiago de Compestela (1605); Leuven (1606); Lille (1610); Seville (1611); Nieupoort (1627); and Madrid (1629).[52] More than just influenced by Spanish ambitions, the colleges in the Low Countries, which have been noted as the most influential in relation to the continental renaissance of Gaelic language and culture responsible for 'Clann Israel' ideology, were forged in the experience of the Spanish Netherlands where a particularly militant style of aggressive, political Catholicism existed. The importation of this ideal can be seen in a number of sources, but an account of a sermon delivered in 1613 expresses the importance of continental influences. In May that year Turlough McCrudden, a friar native to Tyrone who had recently returned from the continent, proclaimed 'that he was come from the Pope to persuade them not to change their religion, but rather to go into rebellion'. He further told his listeners that Tyrconnell would return with 18,000 Spanish troops 'and that, according to a prophecy in a book at Rome, England had only two years more to rule in Ireland'.[53] Although the reception the sermon received is unclear, the message is that of the continentally-constructed image of Clann Israel.

This material presents a challenge to scholars, as Marianne Elliott and others have noted, because the surviving literature is not from the Irish rank-and-file, but 'the "classical" writings of the dispossessed Gaelic élite'.[54] As such, the Gaelic sources need to be handled carefully 'since those who transcribed them (the scribes) effectively decided what would survive and disproportionately selected those showing Catholicism the true religion of Ireland and associating

---

[51] Jerrold Casway, 'Gaelic Maccabeanism: The Politics of Reconciliation' in Jane H. Ohlmeyer (ed.), *Political Thought in Seventeenth-Century Ireland* (Cambridge, 2000), 187.

[52] Declan M. Downey, 'The Irish Contribution to Counter-Reformation Theology in Continental Europe' in Brendan Bradshaw and Dáire Keogh (eds), *Christianity in Ireland: Revisiting the Story* (Blackrock, 2002), 101.

[53] *Calendar of State Papers Relating to Ireland of the Reign of James I, 1601–14*, C. W. Burrell and J. P. Prendergast (eds) (London, 1877), 429–431; quoted in Elliott, *Catholics of Ulster*, 73–74.

[54] Marianne Elliott, *When God Took Sides: Religion and Identity in Ireland–Unfinished History* (Oxford, 2009), 22.

Protestantism with England and foreign ways'.[55] Or put another way, the product of a bard's quill will be much less likely to reflect the sentiment of the rank-and-file population than the ambitions of the patron who supports him. There is yet another layer to the interpretation of these texts when the 'poets and the priests were often one and the same'.[56]

The Confederacy established in 1642 is probably the closest a united Catholic identity came to becoming a reality. Yet even those who could agree that Catholicism and the monarchy were essential requirements for the settlement of affairs in Ireland failed to establish a unified interpretation of what this might entail. The arrival of the papal nuncio in 1645 only solidified the divisions. He excommunicated Catholics he deemed too committed to the cause of Charles I. This placed immense pressure on the twofold political and religious commitments established in the Oath of Association. The nuncio advocated a fundamentalist religious agenda and deemed the only acceptable settlement to be the full restoration of Catholicism in Ireland. While this might leave room for the king to remain, the role of the church would have to be elevated to the status that Ireland would, for all intents and purposes, be a Catholic theocracy. While not going as far as to call Rinuccini's policy 'theocratic', Thomas Cooney did declare his intentions as 'too Ultramontane and not national enough'.[57] Among Rinuccini's demands upon arrival in Ireland were that the Lord Deputy appointed for Ireland be a Catholic, Catholic bishops sit in parliament, an autonomous Catholic university be established and submission to the king's authority take place only after the monarch formalised all concessions to the Catholic religion.[58] Not only did Rinuccini's policies divide lay Catholics, they divided the clergy.[59] While historians have labelled the parties that split under his influence as 'nuncioists' and 'Ormondists', which to some degree implies that one side was more religious than the other, the reality is there were Catholics on both sides. The challenge that befell the Confederacy was how to weigh up two distinct commitments. In fact, even after the implosion of the confederacy brought about by Cromwell's invasion of Ireland, the personal and political implications of holding a Catholic faith

---

[55] Ibid., 22–23.

[56] Elliott, *Catholics of Ulster*, 127. For a discussion of the prominent role of bards in recasting Gaelic identity see, ibid.*,* 132–143.

[57] Thomas L. Cooney, *The Irish Catholic Confederacy and the Puritan Revolution* (New York, 1954), 15.

[58] Raymond Gillespie, *Seventeenth-Century Ireland: Making Ireland Modern* (Dublin, 2006), 171.

[59] Cooney, *Irish Catholic Confederacy*, 240–249, 278–279.

were far from clear. As Micheál Ó Siochrú's excellent study of Cromwellian Ireland illustrates, Catholics during the Interregnum chose a range of ways to interact with a Protestant state, some even going as far as to serve as soldiers in English regiments.[60] The crucial point is that even during the polarised 1640s and 1650s being Catholic did not dominate all aspects of identity. For this reason privileging Catholicism as the primary marker of identity fails to explain personal and corporate activity in early-modern Ireland.

Catholicism certainly has come to serve as an important marker of identity in Irish history and the events of the early-modern period have played a prominent role in popular memory. The key issue is how retrospective this process has been. While Ó hAnnracháin has suggested James VI/I's distrust of Catholic loyalty was 'over-intellectualised', it is probably equally true that a coherent Irish Catholic identity before 1642 is equally a product of fabrication.[61] In fact, it has been suggested that a coherent image of Irish Catholicism cannot be concretely identified before the production of popular ballads between 1640 and 1660 by continentally-trained Catholic clergy. The production of these vernacular verses introduced the seeds for formulating an Irish identity rooted in Catholicism.[62] This fits with J.G. Simms' assertion that it was only after the Interregnum that religion came to replace Gall and Gael as the primary demarcation of conflict.[63] This process was driven not from the Irish side but rather by the Protestant state.[64] By the second half of the seventeenth century 'Irish' and 'papist' came to be used interchangeably for Gaelic and Old English alike.[65] In reality, however, this was a creation of political expediency rather than reality. Successive waves of settlers in Ireland have become amalgamated into the culture of Ireland. Even the most reticent new arrivals, such as Cromwellian planters, assimilated into their new cultural contexts. Because of the mix of Gaelic, Old English, New English and Scots in Ireland through the centuries, Marianne Elliott argues it is untenable to claim that Catholicism is the religion of the Irish race, 'even if that was the

---

[60] Micheál Ó Siochrú, *God's Executioner: Oliver Cromwell and the Conquest of Ireland* (London, 2008), 204–210.

[61] Tadhg Ó hAnnracháin, '"Though Hereticks and Politicians should Misinterpret their Good Zeale": Political Ideology and Catholicism in Early Modern Ireland' in Jane H. Ohlmeyer (ed.), *Political Thought in Seventeenth-Century Ireland* (Cambridge 2000), 174.

[62] Elliott, *When God Took Sides*, 23; C. O'Rahilly (ed.), *Five Seventeenth-Century Political Poems* (Dublin 1952); T. J. Dunne, 'The Gaelic Response to Conquest and Colonization: The Evidence of Poetry', *Studia Hibernica*, 20 (1980), 7–30.

[63] J. G. Simms, *War and Politics in Ireland 1647–1730* (London, 2003), 135.

[64] Clarke, *The Old English in Ireland*, 10–11.

[65] J. C. Beckett, *The Anglo-Irish Tradition* (London, 1976), 36.

assumption (or more often the accusation) made by successive governments'.[66] Thus the prominence of religion and the construction of a homogeneous 'Irish Catholicism' stemmed not merely from the Irish laity themselves, but from external pressures exerted by the literature of Gaelic bards and expatriate clergy, and most of all by the Protestant state.

Presbyterianism in Scotland

As in Ireland, religion has played a prominent role in the formation of identity in Scotland. Presbyterianism, and the Covenanting movement in particular, have had a similar legacy in Scotland as Catholicism has had in Ireland. The signing of the National Covenant in Scotland in 1638 and the formation of the Confederate Catholics of Ireland in 1642 present contemporary parallels. Scotland's 'Covenant for religion, king and kingdom' had a contemporary counterpart in the Catholic Confederates' *Pro Deo, Rege et Patria, Hiberni Unanimes*. Like the construction of an 'Irish Catholic' identity, the historiography of 'Scottish Presbyterianism' developed during the Disruption in the nineteenth century and tended to portray the history of Protestantism from its establishment in the 1560s to the Presbyterian settlement of the Church of Scotland in 1690 as providential and teleological. Yet, like the claims of Catholic unity in Ireland during the same period, this interpretation is hagiographical. Scholars now widely accept that the establishment of Protestantism in Scotland was a slow and varied progression.[67] And, yet, this level of scrutiny is still significantly lacking in relation to the general histories of the Covenanting period. Even the most recent research has failed to fully appreciate the divisive nature of the Covenants, which like the Confederate Catholics, tried to hold together distinctly divergent aims. For example, Kirsteen MacKenzie's recent University of Aberdeen doctoral dissertation, which is excellent in its detailed research and compilation of material relating to Covenanters in England, Ireland and Scotland, presents Covenanting as a predominantly unified espousal of Presbyterianism by a loosely linked network of religious communities with a shared vision for the British Isles.

---

[66] Elliott, *Catholics of Ulster*, 131.

[67] Michael Lynch, 'A Nation Born Again? Scottish Identity in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries' in Dauvit Broun, R. J. Finlay and Michael Lynch (eds), *Image and Identity: The Making and Re-Making of Scotland Through the Ages* (Edinburgh, 1998), 82–104; John MacCallum, *Reforming the Scottish Parish: The Reformation in Fife 1560–1640* (Farnham, 2010).

This perspective is problematic for two reasons. First, neither the National Covenant or Solemn League and Covenant explicitly defines right religion as Presbyterian.[68] Second, the Covenants proved divisive from the beginning.

The National Covenant set out the maintenance of the monarchy, religion in Scotland and the 'publicke peace of the Kingdome' which inherently implied Scotland's sovereignty – as a coherent agenda upon which to establish national unity.[69] While established aspects of Scottish culture, the ambiguous nature in which the three were bound together was intentional. Its authors sought to bring together a nation of individuals with diverse motivations and allow as broad an inclusion as possible.[70] The National Covenant had been framed in this way in order for it to serve as a constitutional declaration enabling cohesion, rather than a subversive document enabling revolution. Its purpose being to bind the people of Scotland not just to God, but to one another.[71] The inherent problem with framing the nation on these three principles proved to be in working out what this might mean in practice and a uniformly agreeable interpretation proved impossible. For William Dickinson and Gordon Donaldson, while the National Covenant intended to unite Scotland, 'it may possibly be regarded as a formula which produced a deceptive appearance of unanimity'.[72]

The broad inclusiveness of the Covenant's language complicated the difficulty of working out the implications in practice. In fact, to be a true 'Covenanter' would mean to uphold king, religion and country without

---

[68] The closest the National Covenant comes to defining what is meant by the oft repeated 'true religion' and 'perfect religion' espoused is the claim 'for maintenance of God's true and Christian religion, and the purity thereof in Doctrine and Sacraments of the true Church of God, the liberty & freedom thereof in her National, Synodal Assemblies, Presbyteries, Sessions, Policy, Discipline and Jurisdiction thereof, as that purity of Religion and liberty of the Church was used, professed, exercised, preached, and confessed according to the reformation of Religion in this realm.' While this might imply Presbyterianism, it does not indicate the relationship between these various jurisdictions. William Croft Dickinson and Gordon Donaldson (eds), *A Source Book of Scottish History* (London, 1954), III, 196; S. R. Gardiner (ed.), *Constitutional Documents of the Puritan Revolution 1625 – 1660* (Oxford, 1906), 124 – 133. The Solemn League and Covenant simply declares the establishment of religion in line with the 'best reformed churches' and rejects bishops. Dickinson and Donaldson, *Source Book of Scottish History*, III, 123.

[69] Dickinson and Donaldson (eds), *Source Book of Scottish History*, III, 101.

[70] David Stevenson, *The Covenanters: the National Covenant and Scotland* (Edinburgh, 1988), 41 – 42.

[71] David Stevenson, *The Scottish Revolution 1637 – 44* (Edinburgh, 2003), 85 – 86.

[72] Dickinson and Donaldson (eds), *Source Book of Scottish History*, III, 104.

prioritising one over the others. The perceived impossibility of this due to inherent contradictions, not simply because the aggressively pro-Presbyterian policies advocated by some proponents of the Covenants, but because it argued for an inversion of authority by which those subscribing the Covenant were to determine the appropriate role of the church and the king, was at the root of the Aberdeen Doctors' rejection of the National Covenant in 1638.[73] Their fears proved to be correct, for the interpretation of covenant obligations proved highly divisive from the beginning. Despite there being no explicit condemnation of episcopacy in the original document an initially implicit opposition turned into an explicit denunciation in November. The General Assembly of the Kirk, which convened eight months after the Covenant began to be signed, ruled that bishops, the Five Articles of Perth and civil powers for ministers were all unlawful. Although the General Assembly decreed this anti-episcopal interpretation, which came to be known as the 'Glasgow Declaration', be added to the National Covenant and it be re-subscribed by the whole population, this is not what necessarily happened in practice.[74] Instead the addition was frequently inserted into existing copies of the Covenant, 'often above existing signatures' or simply added as an addendum after the signatures.[75] Some copies of the Covenant exist with the addition on the back of the document followed by subscriptions. However, rarely do all the original subscribers reappear after the addition. There are yet other surviving copies of the Covenant that make no mention of the Glasgow Declaration at all.[76] The General Assembly's declaration should have meant these copies were destroyed or had the declaration added before being re-subscribed. Since this did not happen, it left the door open for rival interpretations of the Covenant as multiple versions of the remained in circulation. The significance of this should not be underestimated, for it continued to be a point of contention in the Secessionist debates of the eighteenth century.[77]

---

[73] D. Stewart, 'The "Aberdeen Doctors" and the Covenanters', *Records of the Scottish Church History Society*, 22 (1984), 35–44; G.. D. Henderson, *Religious Life in Seventeenth-Century Scotland* (Cambridge, 1937), 168–169.

[74] Stevenson, *The Scottish Revolution*, 125.

[75] Stevenson, *The Covenanters*, 47; James King Hewison, '"Bands" or Covenants in Scotland, with a list of Extant Copies of the Scottish Covenants', *Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland*, 42 (1908), 166–182.

[76] Hewison, '"Bands" or Covenants in Scotland', 173, 174, 177, 179. Some of these covenants contain as many as 550 signatures.

[77] William Wilson, *A Defense of the Reformation-Principles of the Church of Scotland* (Edinburgh, 1739), 474; John Currie, *A Vindication of the Real Reformation-Principles of the Church of Scotland concerning Separation* (Edinburgh, 1740).

By the summer of 1640 the shifting priorities of radical elements among the Covenanters led James Graham, 1st Marquess of Montrose, and seventeen other nobles to sign the Cumbernauld Band in August. The men pledged to defend the 'public ends' set forth in the National Covenant, which they reiterated included the rights of the king, rather than 'the particular and indirect practising of a few'.[78] In general, too little emphasis has been placed on the Cumbernauld Band. Its subscribers are often dismissed as royalists and therefore not true Covenanters, if such a definition can actually exist. Montrose, in particular, casts important light on the entire Covenanting period, for he had subscribed the National Covenant, including the strict Presbyterian interpretation presented in the Glasgow Declaration.[79] However, in the wake of the Bishops' Wars leading elements in Scotland pushed for a fundamental alteration to the aims of the movement. Although David Stevenson has argued very cogently for Scottish ambitions for a federal union with England under the conditions of a religious uniformity, this must be interpreted to some degree as a policy of imperialism that did not resonate with all subscribers of the National Covenant.[80] Certainly the nineteenth-century laudatory history of the Covenanters produced by James Kerr recognised this propensity and stated: 'Covenanters entered into and rejoiced in their vows to God, the Imperialism of King Jesus conquered the Imperialism which prince and priest had been enforcing with rigour; and this Imperialism shall be in the ascendancy yet the world over when the empires of earth shall crown the Christ of God as King of the Church and King of nations'.[81]

Although an inheritor of a particular tradition of the Covenanting movement fuelled by evangelical fervour, Kerr seems to hit the nail on the head here. Whereas Stevenson argues 'the implications of the Covenanters' revolt for the future of the union emerged only gradually', the fact is an imperialistic agenda that looked beyond a simple federal union to a Covenanter theocracy had gained momentum by 1640.[82] This impulse in Scottish Covenanting is what led Lord Broghill, the Cromwellian president of the council for Scotland in 1656, to refer to the rigid Covenanting tradition

---

[78] William Law Mathieson, *Politics and Religion: A Study in Scottish History from the Reformation to the Revolution* (2 vols, Glasgow, 1902), II, 27; Thomas Lumsden, *The Covenants of Scotland* (Paisley, 1914), 255–257.

[79] Hewison, '"Bands" or Covenants in Scotland', 172.

[80] David Stevenson, 'The Early Covenanters and the Federal Union of Britain' in Roger A. Mason (ed.), *Scotland and England 1286–1815* (Edinburgh, 1987), 163–181.

[81] James Kerr, *The Covenants and the Covenanters* (Edinburgh, 1895), 24.

[82] Stevenson, 'The Early Covenanters and the Federal Union', 165.

manifest in the Protester party of James Guthrie and Samuel Rutherford as 'Fifth-monarchist-Presbyterians'.[83] Certainly the shift in ambitions, and in particular the implications for the monarchy, were at the forefront of concerns for Montrose and his fellow subscribers of the Cumbernauld Band. Although not creating an immediate division, it anticipated the first major rupture within the Covenanting movement.

By 1644 Montrose took up the mantle of the king in opposition to a Scottish regime that had signed the Solemn League and Covenant the previous year, but the label royalist is too simplistic to define his motives. The Solemn League and Covenant essentially represented a military allegiance between Scotland and the English parliament against the king with Scotland requiring England to establish a state church in line with 'the example of the best Reformed Churches'.[84] The Parliament of England refused to explicitly name Presbyterianism. Montrose and others rejected the Solemn League and Covenant, believing it directly contravened the commitments set down in the first covenant. For Montrose, the honour of the king–an integral part of the Covenant's aims–had been replaced by an imperialist endeavour to export a particular form of religion to England and Ireland. Since Charles had accepted the establishment of Presbyterianism as the state church in Scotland in 1641, as far as Montrose was concerned, this should have brought matters to an end. He wrote: 'if the third point of the Covenant, the king's honour and authority to be solemnly adhered to, since our religion and liberty was already so wholly and firmly secured' then no further action could be taken. However, if any of the three were justifiably 'in hazard or by all appearance possibly questioned, I should as willingly maintain as any else alive'.[85] In other words, with Presbyterianism established in Scotland and the liberty of the people secured, on what grounds could the king be opposed or saddled with further demands without breaching the National Covenant? Therefore, the Solemn League and Covenant actually redefined the aims stated in the first covenant. Edward Cowan, in his masterful study of the man, argues Montrose believed the Solemn League and Covenant 'prejudiced religion and the liberty of the subject, that it obliged Scots to arm against their king to maintain the liberties of the English parliament, and that it involved perjury and disloyalty'

---

[83] Frances Dow, *Cromwellian Scotland: 1651–1660* (Edinburgh, 1999), 204.

[84] Dickinson and Donaldson (eds), *Source Book of Scottish History*, III, 123.

[85] Historical Manuscript Commission, III, *Rollo*, 407; Edward J. Cowan, *Montrose: For Covenant and King* (London, 1977), 142.

for it contravened the National Covenant.[86] Not only did it sacrifice the king's honour for the sake of an imperialistic interpretation of 'Reformed religion', it actually put the sovereignty of Scotland at risk. On those grounds, the Solemn League and Covenant breached the National Covenant on two of three grounds. Royalism, at least for those who signed the first Covenant, needs to be viewed as operating within what they perceived to be their Covenanted obligations. Montrose might be better understood as one who felt compelled on a personal level to interpret the National Covenant holistically, although personal rivalries also played an important role.

Essentially, the principles asserted in the National Covenant and Solemn League and Covenant were not the same. While the National Covenant sought to secure an already established status quo in Scotland and assert a national identity unified in king, religion and Scottish sovereignty and liberties, the Solemn League and Covenant represented an imperialistic agenda that declared the exportation of Scottish religion to England and ultimately beyond. Scholars disagree how fundamentally an imperialistic ideology was embedded in the thinking of those who drew up the National Covenant, but John Coffey argues it was present in the thoughts of Samuel Rutherford well before 1643.[87] For Rutherford and others, it was rooted in a growing belief that Scotland had a prominent role in the apocalyptic triumph of Christ over the kingdom of Antichrist and even that the Scots must choose between King Jesus and King Charles.[88] This became a fundamental force for exporting Scotland's second Reformation beyond its own borders. However, this re-prioritisation of covenant obligations threatened the other two core priorities of king and liberty. That the Scots who supported the Solemn League and Covenant had an altogether different end in mind than their co-subscribers in England is evidenced by events that followed.

The endeavour proved hugely disappointing for the Scots as the sought after Presbyterian settlement for the Church of England never materialised. As the First Civil War raged, Scots divines serving in England as chaplains became dismayed over what passed for acceptable protestant religion among English parliamentarians.[89] The rise of the sects caused them to fear that

---

[86] Cowan, *Montrose*, 143.

[87] John Coffey, *Politics, Religion and the British Revolutions: The Mind of Samuel Rutherford* (Cambridge, 1997), 225–253.

[88] For the most recent study see: Crawford Gribben, 'The Church of Scotland and the English Apocalyptic Imagination, 1630–1650', *Scottish Historical Review,* 88 (2009), 34–56.

[89] Robert Baillie, *Letters and Journals,* D. Laing (ed.) (3 vols, Edinburgh, 1841–2), II,

young impressionable Scottish soldiers might be corrupted by the heresies that spread through England like gangrene. In response they carried out an effective ideological campaign against English non-conformity through print, both by encouraging Thomas Edwards' *Gangraena* (1646) and establishing a newspaper in London whose 'golden words first transmuted into the lead of bullets; and these in turn to the logomachy in the south', according to Joad Raymond.[90] With the danger of losing on a popular front terrifying clergymen, the Scots worked incredibly hard in the Westminster Assembly of Divines to reach an acceptable Calvinist settlement at a theological level. This, however, became a heated process. While they managed to get the theological framework they wanted the primary point of contention remained the order of church government. Although the assembly carried on until 1652 the Covenanting regime recognised that left to the English parliament Presbyterianism would not be established.

In 1647 a faction of Covenanters dissatisfied with the results of the first civil war entered into negotiations with the king. The following year, precipitated by Scottish presbyterian ambitions, England plummeted into a second civil war. The allegiance of the Scottish state switched from the English parliament to the crown. On one hand this signalled a return to ideals espoused in the National Covenant, by upholding the rights of the crown that the second Covenant had undermined, but on the other hand it persisted in imperialistic aspirations, setting the sole condition for supporting the king to be that he initiate a seven-year trial period of Presbyterianism in England. In some ways this represented a further radicalisation of the Covenanting movement, for it represented Scottish determination in English affairs, despite the English Parliament's explicit rejection of pledging themselves to Presbyterianism during the negotiations for the Solemn League and Covenant. Whereas some Scots perceived this their Covenanted duty, there was actually little scope for this even in the Solemn League and Covenant. Although many had desired a religious Covenant espousing Presbyterianism to hold the two countries together in shared expectations, what the English parliament had entered into was a civil league.[91] However, the confusion had been embedded in the document by invoking a title that encapsulated both of these expectations rather than clarifying the distinctions.

185–186.

[90] Joad Raymond, *Pamphlets and Pamphleteering in Early-Modern Britain* (Cambridge, 2007), 192.

[91] Baillie, *Letters & Journals*, II, 90.

The Engagement with the king in 1647 rooted its authority in the Solemn League and Covenant. It demanded the king assert his 'content to confirm the said League and Covenant by Act of Parliament in both kingdoms' and identified the Engagers' duty on the condition, 'His Majesty is willing to give satisfaction concerning the settling of religion', to 'engage themselves first in a peaceable way and manner to endeavour that His Majesty may come to London in safety'.[92] The second English Civil War was brief with the Scottish Engager army being decimated at the Battle of Preston in August 1648. Yet out of the crisis grew another radicalised tradition that profoundly shaped all subsequent Covenanting traditions. Those who rejected the Engagement did so on the grounds that Scotland risked breaching its Covenanted responsibilities by accepting an ungodly king. Hence a division developed between the engagers (comprising those deemed as 'moderate' Covenanters as well as some royalists, although the two need not be incompatible) and the Kirk Party made up of highly conservative Presbyterians, termed by Gordon Donaldson as 'extremists'.[93] This radical party came into power in Scotland in the wake of the catastrophic results of the Engagement. The Whiggamore Raid, the name referring to the cattle drovers of the southwest, physically took control from the Engagers in Edinburgh with the help of Oliver Cromwell's army. The committee of estates fled the capital and in January 1649 the Act of Classes barred all but the most fervent Presbyterians from government. While the chief plotters of the Engagement — Montrose being listed by name — were barred for life, soldiers involved in the invasion of England were banned for ten years, takers of the Engagement oath for five years, and those deemed unfit by their local church for any kind of scandalous life or 'who neglect the worship of God in thair families' for a year.[94] This enabled the establishment of a theocratic, Presbyterian state. The execution of the king by the English parliament seven days later, however, threw Scotland into chaos, for since they had ransomed the king to the parliament they felt his blood was on their hands as well. The committee of estates moved quickly to proclaim Charles II's full rights to the crowns of Scotland, England, Ireland and France, on the condition that he reject his father's sinfulness and subscribe the Covenants. In light of Scotland's interference in English affairs throughout the 1640s the English parliament viewed this as an unequivocal provocation. Cromwell's army entered Scotland in July 1650 and eventually routed a depleted Scottish

---

[92] Donaldson (ed.), *Scottish Historical Documents*, 214 – 215.

[93] Dickinson and Donaldson (eds), *Source Book of Scottish History,* III, 139.

[94] Donaldson, *Scottish Historical Documents,* 218 – 220.

army at Dunbar on 3 September. Rather than fielding the strongest possible force, the radical end of the Covenanting spectrum upheld the Act of Classes and forced far-reaching purges of the army, hoping a Gideon-esque force of the godly would be blessed. Instead an almost inexplicable disgrace took place at Dunbar, with over 10,000 Scots taken prisoner by a numerically inferior army. The failure of the Scots to defeat Cromwell at Dunbar opened Pandora's box in relation to explaining God's 'wrath' and providential judgement against His Covenanted people.

Interpreting Failure

In response to the humiliation at Dunbar the moderate Covenanters relaxed the Act of Classes through the passage of the 'first public resolution' by a commission of the General Assembly on 14 December 1650. In January 1651 the Act of Classes was fully rescinded. Already divisions existed between the 'extreme' Presbyterians and those of a more moderate persuasion. The Remonstrants, many of whom had supported the Whiggamore Raid, rejected the rescinding of the Act of Classes and support for Charles II on the grounds that he lacked any real fervour for the Covenants. When these positions were upheld by the moderate 'Resolutioner' majority at the General Assemblies of 1651 and 1652, the Remonstrants submitted formal protests and became known as Protesters. The Resolutioners were dominated by the belief that the Covenants sought to establish Scottish unity on the basis of religion, monarchy and liberties. The Protesters argued that the inclusion of the ungodly in governance broke Scotland's obligation to right religion, moreover, the godlessness of Charles II meant he could not meet the strict criteria of a Covenanted king.[95] The positions of the two groups on the monarchy set the tone for their relationships with the English regime that dominated Scotland between 1650 and 1660.

The Protester Patrick Gillespie argued Scotland, like Israel before them, suffered for the sins of their king for: 'the King's sin becomes the Kingdom's sin, in so far as it is not mourned for, and repented of.' Their fault had been to follow Israel's error and request a king, which according to 1 Samuel 8, was not God's desired form of governance.[96] On these grounds the Protesters

---

[95] Donaldson, *Scottish Historical Documents*, 220–222.

[96] Patrick Gillespie, *Rulers Sins the Causes of National Judgments: or, a Sermon Preached at the Fast, upon the 26th Day of December, 1650* (Glasgow, 1718), 17.

rejected the necessity of continuing to support Charles II, especially after he
fled to the continent following his defeat at Worcester on 3 September 1651.
The Resolutioners rejected this, viewing it as a breach of the Covenants, and
continued to support the king. However, they eventually came to terms with
the protectoral regime and agreed to stop praying for the Charles II in 1656,
a breach of their previously held view of their Covenanted responsibilities.[97]
They had been driven to this compromise because the Cromwellian government
had favoured the Protesters in settling ecclesiastical affairs after the abolition
of the General Assembly in 1653. Protester cooperation with the state, to
varying degrees, enabled them to place their own candidates in vacant charges.
Whereas James Guthrie and Samuel Rutherford appear to have rejected the
temptation to treat with the new regime, other Protesters did. In 1654 Patrick
Gillespie managed to facilitate an arrangement whereby the protester minority
gained an increasing share of charges that came to be known as 'Gillespie's
Charter'.[98]

     Gillespie went as far as entering English Independents into charges in
the Presbytery of Glasgow. He seems to have moved away from the ideal of
pursuing the perfection of the state church at the national level and instead opted
for providing a godly ministry at the local level. While not himself becoming
a Congregationalist, for he continued to work through the Presbyterian
structures of Glasgow's presbytery, he certainly moved away from the national
ideals of the first covenant and the imperialistic imperatives of the second,
much to the chagrin of both Resolutioners and some fellow Protesters alike.[99]
His fellow Protester Sir Archibald Johnston of Wariston lambasted him as 'not
only Archbishop of Glascow but Metropolitan and Patriarch of Scotland'.[100]
Although Gillespie continued to champion a federal model of theology after
the Restoration, his Covenanter credentials had certainly been compromised
during the Interregnum by allowing a state-sanctioned model of provincial
certifiers that in some regions could be dominated by individuals who blatantly
rejected Presbyterianism and the Covenants.[101] Two points must be emphasised

---

[97] Dow, *Cromwellian Scotland*, 206.
[98] R. Scott Spurlock, *Cromwell and Scotland: Conquest and Religion* (Edinburgh, 2007),
     145–148.
[99] Ibid., 141–142.
[100] Sir Archibald Johnston, of Wariston, *Diary of Sir Archibald Johnston of Wariston*, D. H.
     Flemming and J. D. Ogilvie (eds) (3 vols, Edinburgh, 1919–1940), III, 44.
[101] Patrick Gillespie, *The Ark of the Covenant Opened; Or, A Treatise of the Covenant of
     Redemption Between God & Christ, as the Foundation of the Covenant of Grace* (Edinburgh,
     1677).

here. Firstly, the animosity between the Protesters and Resolutioners by the end of the Interregnum was such that Robert Baillie, a Resolutioner, declared that many of his colleagues believed that an illness befalling the Protester Patrick Gillespie was 'the evident hand of God upon him, and [they] would not have sorrowed for his death'.[102] According to James Anderson, such sentiments were common place and had it not been for the 'more merciful hands' of the restored episcopacy 'than those of the Resolutioners' the protesters would have faced a savage persecution'.[103] Second, however, to limit the responses to the failure of the Covenanting movement to these two camps fails to recognise just how fragmented it had become.

Abandoning the Covenants

In the summer of 1651 a number of papers began to be submitted to Protester meetings around the country questioning not Scotland's adherence to the Covenants, but the Covenants themselves.[104] The first Scot to espouse this position publicly without hiding behind anonymity was Alexander Jaffray, former provost of Aberdeen. He had impeccable Covenanter credentials having been an emissary for the Kirk in the negotiations with Charles II to bring him back to Scotland and supported the demand that Charles II sign the Covenants before being allowed to return. Moreover, Jaffray had been imprisoned for several months after the Battle of Dunbar. However, by 1651 he came to the position that the Covenants in general, and Presbyterianism in particular, had become idols for Scotland.[105] To put his own mind at ease, Jaffray entered into open discussions in Aberdeen. He soon became influential among a group of important figures in Aberdeen's colleges including: John Menzies (professor of divinity at Marischal College and minister of Greyfriars church, Aberdeen), John Row (minister of Aberdeen's third charge and instructor of Hebrew at Marischal College), William Muir (elder in the Kirk, professor of mathematics and principal of Marischal College) and the layman Andrew Birnie (regent in Marischal College). Despite several consultations with leading Protesters, including Samuel Rutherford and Wariston, the

---

[102] Baillie, *Letters and Journals*, III, 356.

[103] James Anderson, *The Ladies of the Covenant* (Redfield, 1853), 30.

[104] Spurlock, *Cromwell and Scotland,* 107–115.

[105] Alexander Jaffray, *Diary of Alexander Jaffray*, John Barclay (ed.) (3rd edn, Aberdeen, 1856), 61.

group declared for Independency on 24 May 1654. Others followed suit.
These Scottish Independents also benefitted from 'Gillespie's Charter'.
With a quorum of four named certifiers the Independents could control the
placement of ministers in Aberdeenshire, Banffshire, Morayshire, Inverness-
shire, Ross and Cromarty, Sutherland, Caithness, Orkney and Shetland. The
heart of the movement continued to be centred in the colleges in Aberdeen,
but their influence spread.[106] By the end of 1656 the Resolutioner John
Livingstone feared all the vacant charges in the Lothians might be filled by
'professed Independents … from Aberdeen's nest'.[107] By the Restoration the
movement splintered, with some – like Jaffray – later joining the Quakers, while
others like John Menzies eventually conformed to episcopacy.

   Yet another strand among the Protesters can be identified in the practices of
Andrew Cant. A vociferous Protester and minister in Aberdeen, Cant was both
repulsed by the Independents' separation from the Kirk and envious of their
ability to limit the ordinances of the church to those deemed truly godly. Cant
therefore introduced a practice in Aberdeen that mirrored John Goodwin's
model of Independency in London. All were welcomed to the church to
hear Cant's sermons, but only those privately interviewed and judged worthy
were admitted to communion. Since the Kirk already required examination
in order to receive communion, Cant's approach must have been even more
rigorous.[108] By January 1656 limited communions had already occurred twice,
although Resolutioner colleagues bitterly criticised Cant's practice and fellow
Protesters challenged him. His approach represented an attempt to draw in
the Independent John Menzies in an effort to heal the rift created by the
Aberdeen Independents' separation from the Kirk, which it seems to have
achieved. However, the practice of Cant demonstrates a trend in Protester
thinking that is evident in Samuel Rutherford by the end of the Interregnum.
The events of the 1640s and 1650s had demonstrated to Rutherford and other
Protesters the impossibility of holding to a doctrine of election that espoused
the majority of the population of Scotland were degenerate alongside a
practice of binding the whole nation together through covenants that held
them responsible for godliness. According to John Coffey, Rutherford faced
a 'choice between submitting to the authority of a Presbyterian hierarchy that
was prepared to tolerate malignants, and dissenting from the authority and

---

[106] Spurlock, *Cromwell and Scotland*, 145 – 148.

[107] Ibid., 149; Baillie, *Letters and Journals*, III, 327.

[108] Margo Todd, *The Culture of Protestantism in Early Modern Scotland* (New Haven, 2000),
      91 – 92.

forming small gatherings of the godly'.[109] Both of these options seemed to breach the Covenants. Something had to give and the dismantling of the state church in 1653 allowed for working through the implications of the covenants in new ways. Yet as early as 1640 the proponents of a religiously radical interpretation of the National Covenant had been lambasted by Charles I as 'in truth Brownists and Anabaptists and other independent sectaries' for despite claiming a devotion to national Presbyterianism, they 'are as far from allowing the church government by law established there [Presbyterian] (or indeed any church-government whatsoever) as they are from consenting to the episcopal'.[110] So while some Covenanters failed to recognise the impossibility of what they were aspiring to do, some critics did not.

At the Restoration the vast majority of Scots conformed.[111] Although 270 ministers were deposed, this represented less than a quarter of the clergy.[112] Conformity by the majority of Scotland made it possible for a radicalised, Protester interpretation of the Covenants wherein a godly minority could claim continued obedience without the impossible burden of making the whole nation conform. Only as a minority could the Covenanting movement survive the failures and divisions of the 1640s and 1650s. Moreover, the impossibility of restoring a Presbyterian state church on the Covenanted model in 1690 meant the Westminster Confession of Faith replaced the central role of the covenants. While the United Societies may have rejected this compromise, the inherently divisive nature of the covenants had proved incapable of providing the unity the National Covenant had aspired to.

While a tendency to refer to the Covenanters as a largely homogenous movement that, despite facing changing political challenges between 1638 and 1690, was unified in their vision of establishing Presbyterianism continues to persist, the reality is that it remains difficult to fix a definition of what the label 'Convenanter' actually meant. For instance, Keith Brown has defined the Covenanters as 'supporters of the 1638 National Covenant and the 1643 Solemn League and Covenant'.[113] Louise Yeoman takes a different approach

---

[109] Coffey, *Politics, Religion and the British Revolutions,* 224.

[110] Mathieson, *Politics and Religion,* II, 59; Gilbert Burnet, *The History of my own Time*, O. Airy (ed.) (2 vols, Oxford, 1897), I, 287.

[111] Alasdair Raffe, *The Culture of Controversy: Religious Arguments in Scotland, 1660–1714* (Woodbridge, 2012), 33.

[112] Stewart J. Brown, 'Religion and Society to *c.*1900' in T. M. Devine and Jenny Wormald (eds), *Oxford Handbook of Modern Scottish History* (Oxford, 2012), 84.

[113] Keith M. Brown, 'Covenanters' in David F. Wright, David C. Lachman and Donald E. Meek (eds), *Dictionary of Scottish Church History and Theology* (Edinburgh, 1993),

and identifies the Covenanters as 'those who resisted the Restoration church settlement in Scotland'.[114] The inherent problem with these approaches is that they tend to ignore the complexities of the period between 1648 and 1662. More recently, Kirsteen MacKenzie roots the Covenanters primarily in their espousal of Presbyterianism, as Robert Wodrow had in the eighteenth century. She highlights the willingness of Presbyterians in Ireland to reject the political divisions rife in Scotland during the Interregnum by formulating the 1654 Act of Bangor. For her this indicates an overarching commitment to Presbyterianism above all else.[115] The difficulty here, however, is that the Irish rejection of Scottish divisions does not provide an adequate definition of 'Covenanting' in Ireland. Instead it demonstrates that Presbyterians in Ireland were willing to ignore their Covenanted responsibilities in order to foster their own insular and marginalised Presbyterian communities. This approach, which has been prominent in Presbyterian historiography, fails to recognise that the espousal of Presbyterianism alone is not enough to explain the Covenanting movements. In this regard the work of John Coffey is very helpful, for he argues Covenanting was not primarily religious or ecclesiological, but rather political.[116] This serves as a much more useful definition, because it recognises a wider set of motivations than just a commitment to Presbyterianism. It helps make sense of crucial figures, such as Montrose, who must be recognised as core components of defining the movement in the first few years. Rather than an aberration, Montrose demonstrates how widely the term must be defined. Moreover, it allows us to include important figures as diverse as Robert Leighton, Patrick Gillespie and John Menzies – who all signed the Covenants, but were able to justify conforming after the Restoration – in the story of the Covenanting movement.

Conclusion

At the outset, this article stressed the dynamic and complex nature of identity. In some ways the historiography of Ireland and Scotland has been much

---

        218–219.

[114] Louise Yeoman, 'Covenanters' in Michael Lynch (ed.), *The Oxford Companion to Scottish History* (Oxford, 2001), 113.

[115] Kirsteen M. MacKenzie, 'Presbyterian Church Government and the "Covenanted Interest" in the Three Kingdoms, 1649–60 (Ph.D. thesis, University of Aberdeen, 2008), 147–148.

[116] Coffey, *Politics, Religion and the British Revolutions*, 17.

better at upholding the important role played by religion in the formation of identity in the early-modern period, whereas it has only recently been restored in the once Marxist dominated historiography of England.[117] The problem in Scottish and Irish historiography has been the prominence given to religion as the primary source of identity and the unscrutinised acceptance of labels. The reality is people inhabiting the Atlantic Archipelago had multifaceted identities forged and altered by changing contexts. Religion certainly played an important role in early-modern Ireland and Scotland, but the hagiographical traditions that were solidified in the nineteenth century must be critically reassessed. The challenge for historians who inhabit an increasingly secularised world is to be able to locate the role of religion in the past in a way that steers between the tempting Scylla of religion being a non-factor in human consciousness and the Charybdis of religion being an opiate of the masses that rendered individuals and entire communities powerless to act for their own interests. Some valiant attempts to unpack artificially homogeneous identities have been made, but they have yet to take root. Brendan Fitzpatrick helpfully emphasises this in relation to the seventeenth-century Irish context: 'In terms of modern Irish nationalism and republicanism (whose traditions are in many respects polar opposites), it may be surprising to learn that the Catholic Church in Ireland competed against itself for English Protestant toleration, and that this included negotiations with the Cromwellian slaughterers of Drogheda and Wexford, but the fact must be borne in mind that the church had never perceived its mission as political in either nationalist or republican terms'.[118]

Catholicism in early-modern Ireland was not fundamentally political and a singular interpretation of religion was not the only element driving the Covenants in Scotland. Scholars must be able critically and sympathetically to place religion within the complex cultural milieus of early-modern Britain and Ireland and accept that the dynamics of identity meant the role of religion was not static or homogeneous.

University of Glasgow

---

[117] Andrew Bradstock, *Radical Religion in Cromwell's England: A Concise History from the English Civil War to the End of the Commonwealth* (New York and London, 2011).

[118] Fitzpatrick, *Seventeenth-Century Ireland*, 216.