Militant Protestantism and British Identity, 1603–1642

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BY

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For Maureen, Maisie and Cameron

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CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION: THE UNION OF THE CROWNS, THE PUBLIC SPHERE AND GREAT EXPECTATIONS

This book is about the political consequences caused when reality fails to meet great expectations, when promise is not met and when leaders are blamed for causing this gap between the real and the imagined.

The 1603 Union of the Crowns, in which James VI of Scotland inherited the thrones of England and Ireland, was a watershed moment in British history. The union laid the foundation for the future formation of the British state, the forging of the British Empire and the emergence of Britain as a world power. However, to those living in the period 1603–42 these historical events were in the distant future. When many contemporaries thought about the meaning of the union they often considered it in confessional terms. For those with a militant Protestant mindset the union was pregnant with the potential to create a Protestant superpower, one that was capable of both protecting fellow Protestants on the European continent and providing a counterbalance to militarized and reinvigorated post-Tridentine Catholicism. However, as the decades progressed it became clear that the reality of the situation was quite different. Britain was not a Protestant superpower. In fact, for most of the period, a time when Europe was frequently at war, Britain was neutral, and the times it did attempt to intervene in Continental affairs ended in abject failure.

That there was a serious disjuncture between what many thought Britain should be – a Protestant and Continental power – and what it was in reality – formidable enough to avoid invasion but prone to neutrality and failure – created serious tensions between the early Stuart kings and a significant portion of the body politic. Therefore, as will be argued throughout, militant Protestantism and the militant Protestant conceptualization of British identity reveal a great deal about both oppositional politics under the early Stuarts and the origins of the British Civil Wars. Not only were militant Protestants frequently disappointed that their great expectations of what Britain should be did not match the reality of what it actually was, they were also frequently willing to voice their

– 1 –

disappointment in a public manner – whether this was in Parliament, in the pulpit, in print or in circulated manuscripts. The early Stuart monarchs, for their part, understood these frustrations and often sympathized with them, but for various reasons were never able to offer a satisfactory reconciliation between militant Protestants' hopes for the potential of Britain and the perceived failure to meet this potential.

This perceived failure to reach the militant potential of the Union of Crowns was not only a significant failure of leadership; it was also a failure of vision and communication. For the Stuarts British identity needed to be centred first and foremost on their dynasty, with confessional interests often made secondary. This is not to suggest that confessional interests were not important to the early Stuarts – after all, James I and Charles I were committed Protestants – but time and time again they showed that the security and future of the Stuart dynasty trumped confessional interests. Perhaps this was because, unlike Elizabeth I, their claim was not dependant on Protestantism, but based on their bloodline and, as they increasingly argued, divine favour. Because the needs of the Stuart state and dynasty were prioritized, the Stuarts often showed a willingness to engage with Catholic powers that often made their militant Protestant subjects uncomfortable. At no time was this more apparent than when James I chose to negotiate a marriage treaty for his son to a Spanish Catholic princess despite the fact that Continental Protestants, including his daughter, son-in-law and grandchildren, appeared in imminent danger at the outbreak of the Thirty Years' War in the early 1620s. This, as will be argued in Chapter 2, was a significant transitional moment when many militant Protestants began to take their disappointments public in open opposition to the king.

As conceptualized here, militant Protestantism was the belief that the world was divided into two camps – the false church of Antichrist (the Roman Catholic Church) and the true church of Christ (Protestantism). Central to this mindset was the belief that a violent clash between these two camps was inevitable. Militant Protestants believed that those who belonged to the camp of the true church needed to be vigilant because they had to be prepared for the inevitable attacks that would come from the false church, and, if necessary, they needed to be prepared to go on the offensive. Perhaps most importantly, militant Protestants believed that the true church knew no boundaries: it was an internationalist perspective that imbued within its adherents the belief that Protestants everywhere needed to protect one another, to take up arms in each other's defence and to attack their common enemies.

As an ideology, militant Protestantism pre-dated the Union of Crowns and its formulation had both domestic and international contexts. In England, militant Protestantism was shaped by the mid-Tudor tumults and the hegemony of the Foxean martyrological narrative in the Elizabethan era. English Protes-

tant identity was forever transformed by the Marian persecutions and found its apotheosis in John Foxe's *Book of Martyrs* (1563), a book that could be found, alongside the Bible, in nearly every English parish after 1570.[1] Foxe's book was full of detailed accounts of the martyrdom of adherents of the true church at the hands of Papists, pagans and other enemies of true Christianity. The Foxean narrative established that the true church was the uncorrupted apostolic church which gradually, over the centuries, became corrupted by popish innovations. Thus the visible, institutional church became the corrupted church of the papal Antichrist, but in the meantime there remained a core group of adherents to the invisible, true church. The Reformation, in this account, was seen as God's divine intervention which allowed the true church, in certain places like England, to once again become the visible church, while in other places, like Spain, the institutional church remained the corrupt church of the papal Antichrist. Foxe's narrative was radical, as it maintained that a small group, often in opposition to secular authority, had maintained the true church throughout the centuries.[2] This radicalism was diminished in England by the fact that the true church was made the institutional church by royal fiat, creating the notion of the 'Godly prince' – a ruler that fostered and protected the true church. The connection between Godly prince, the true church and the people was a major source for cooperation and collaboration between monarch and people in England, especially in the forging of a Protestant identity for the English nation, under Elizabeth I and into the reign of James I, as the Foxean narrative was frequently used to bolster the authority and image of the monarchy, especially in times of crisis, such as 1588 and 1605, when the monarch was under threat from Catholic intrigue. Nevertheless, Foxe's narrative retained its radical potential and was used by those who criticized the 'but half reformed' status of the English church among vocal Puritans and Presbyterians.

Scottish Protestants equally adhered to the Foxean narrative of Protestant history, but their version of Protestant identity sharply veered from the English when it came to the role of the monarch.[3] In England the Reformation was brought about by king (and eventually queen) and Parliament, while in Scotland it was the product of rebellious noblemen in collaboration with Parliament. This independence of the origins of Scottish Protestantism from the Crown was an important part of the forging of Scottish Protestant identity and a major source of contention between kirk and king as James VI came of age in the last two decades of the sixteenth century. There were other significant differences between the two churches. One prominent group within the Scottish kirk, nominally headed by Andrew Melville, were proponents of the 'two kingdoms' theory that the kirk should be separate from secular authority. The division between the Crown and the Melvillians was political in nature and the two sides shared a basic adherence to Calvinist theology. Following his accession to the English

throne James ushered through a series of reforms in the episcopacy, the General Assembly and introduced the Five Articles of Perth in an attempt to bring the churches of his two kingdoms into a greater convergence, even if James's enforcement of these innovations was haphazard and almost nonexistent.

To be sure, despite James's attempt to create convergence, there were still significant religious differences between England and Scotland. First, there was a difference in ecclesiastical polity: episcopacy remained in place in England while Scotland was a mixed polity of Presbyterian and episcopacy. Second, there was a liturgical difference between the two churches: the English church had a prayer book and was characterized by a set liturgy, while the Scottish church placed more emphasis on extemporaneous prayer and preaching. Scholars have typically focused on these differences to suggest that the two kingdoms were very far apart in their religious practices during this period and that perhaps the gulf between the two was unbridgeable.[4]

However, the differences between English and Scottish Protestant identity and practice are less glaring when the two churches are placed in an international context. The era of the 'Second Reformation' – an era that saw the rise of Calvinism, the Catholic Reformation and increasingly militant and violent confessional divisions – had a significant impact on the formulation of militant Protestant identity in Britain. Indeed, it was the international nature of Calvinism that provided an important point of contact between the formulations of Protestant identity in England and Scotland. Internationalism was important during the initial years of Calvinist expansion, and during his life Calvin endeavoured to make his church an international church.[5] From his base in Geneva Calvin himself kept an active correspondence with adherents to his movement from Scotland and England to the Low Countries to Hungary. Calvin's works were translated into French, Dutch, English, Italian, Spanish, German, Czech and Polish. Geneva, as the centre of early international Calvinism, was home to Protestant refugees from all over Europe. And even after Calvin's death in 1564 his church retained its international character. Calvinist territories from the Palatinate, to Bohemia, to Poland took up collections for Geneva whenever it was threatened with invasion by the Duke of Savoy.[6] The Synods of Tonneins (1614) and Dort (1618–19) and the *Harmony of Confessions* (1581) were all attempts at creating greater international Calvinist solidarity. The Geneva Bible, with its marginal commentary and references to various Calvinist catechisms further helped to create a sense of doctrinal solidarity. The international composition of the student bodies at Reformed universities in Heidelberg, Ghent, Sedan, Leiden and Geneva fostered an international intellectual exchange amongst Calvinists.

Both the English and Scottish churches blended aspects of Calvinism – or the Reformed tradition – with particularities that often reflected domestic political developments. Such national particularities, however, did not prohibit

both churches from the influence of international Calvinism. Under Edward VI (1547–53) England became a place of refuge for leading reformers from the Continent, such as Vermigli, Bucer and a Lasco, seeking refuge after Emperor Charles V's victory over the Schmalkaldic League at Muhlenberg. Likewise, Edwardian England was a destination for Scottish Protestant refugees, such as John Knox. During the Marian restoration of Catholicism both English and Scots reformers fled to the Continent where they often congregated together, as in Frankfurt. While the Frankfurt community split because Scottish proposals for a more Calvinist discipline were rejected by the English as too austere, it was used by English exiles in Geneva.[7] Therefore, while these differences over ecclesiology and liturgy certainly existed, too much should not be made of them – they were not impediments to cohesion in worldview. It is important to remember that both English and Scottish reformers alike experienced the cycles of reform, repression and exile that went into shaping their narrative of the visible and invisible, true and false churches of Christ and Antichrist. Significant reformers in both kingdoms spent time on the Continent and shared English translations of the works of Continental reformers. Indeed, the fact that there was no language barrier between England and Lowland Scotland (the heart of the reform movement) should not be overlooked. Works translated in England were read in Scotland and vice versa.

English and Scottish connections to the Continent continued after the initial years of reform through the end of the sixteenth century. Because Calvinism was an international movement its adherents were spread all over Europe. Different Calvinists found themselves in very different political situations. Some, as those in Scotland, began as a minority movement but eventually found themselves under a Calvinist church and king. Others, as those in France, began as a minority as well but continued to struggle for recognition from a staunchly Catholic monarchy. Still others, as in the Palatinate, were princes who converted to Calvinism and conducted a top-down conversion of their realms. This diversity of political situations meant that those kingdoms where the monarch and the majority of the people were Calvinist found themselves in a position where it was possible to aid, either monetarily or militarily, their co-religionists who were in the minority or struggling to gain independence, as in the Low Countries, or recognition, as in France, from Catholic monarchs. Scholars of Calvinism have labelled the militant pro-Protestant foreign policies employed by such Continental figures as Count Johan Casimir of the Palatinate, Christian of Anhalt and the Earl of Leicester in England, 'political Calvinism'.[8]

'Political Calvinism' was primarily a form of anti-popery and therefore it did not necessarily exclude the possibility of a closer defensive alliance with Lutherans and did not depend on theological cohesion between the two confessions. To be sure, there were significant divisions between Lutherans and Calvinists in the age of the Second Reformation over the Eucharist, soteriology and so on.

The Formula of Concord (1577) patched up divisions in Lutheranism between Gnesio-Lutherans (those who subscribed to the original doctrines of Martin Luther on predestination and the Eucharist) and the Phillipists (the followers of Melanchthon who tended to agree with Calvin on the Eucharist) but it also further codified the differences between Lutheran and Reformed.[9] However, the Formula caused some consternation within Lutheranism, as the Danish King Frederick II refused to sign it believing that it would only cause discord within Protestantism at a time when militant Catholicism was on the upswing.[10] Calvinists made concerted efforts to bridge the gaps between Lutheran and Reformed as well. Irenic works produced by German Calvinists such as of Zacharius Ursinus's *Admonitio* (1581) and David Pareus's *Irenicum* (1614) attempted to 'win [Lutherans] over by persuasion' and stress the points of agreement between Reformed and Lutheran.[11] In this way the Calvinist irenic movement was an attempt to gain concessions within the empire by the Reformed church and be brought under the rubric of the Peace of Augsburg. It was also an attempt to lay the groundwork for a defensive alliance in the face of fears of a militant post-Tridentine Catholic Church.

These movements crossed the Channel where they made a significant impact on British Protestant identity. The Elizabethan regime laboured to aid Protestants on the Continent financially and diplomatically while seeking liberty of conscience for them if they lived under Catholic rulers.[12] The Elizabethan policy shifted from diplomacy to military intervention in 1585 with an expedition to the Netherlands led by the Earl of Leicester. Various treatises advocating both Protestant unity and aggressive anti-popery were printed in England around the time of this shift in foreign policy. Closer examination of these works shows a strong emphasis on the international aspects of Protestantism, a desire to lay aside all doctrinal differences and focus on the things that united them, such as a strong dislike of the papacy and a common interest in stemming the tide of the aggressive Catholic Reformation. Johan Casimir's justification to the French king for supporting the Huguenots appeared in an English translation in 1579.[13] The works of Danish Lutheran Niels Hemmingsen presented a desire for Protestant unification. The treatise *The Faith of the Church Militant* appeared in a version translated by Thomas Rogers in 1581. In the translator's preface Rogers relates that the reason he translated Hemmingson's work was to prove that 'Protestants are not so, as the Papists give out, at variance among themselves. For this work, with infinite other good books of foraine writers in our English tongue, doth shew, that touching the substance of Religion we varie not.'[14] Hemmingsen had attracted the ire of several German Gnesio-Lutherans, especially August of Saxony, for his views on the Eucharist because they veered too closely to Calvinism.[15] Hemmingsen was no Calvinist, but as a prototypical Phillipist he represented the branch of Lutheranism that was more willing to reach out

to the Reformed church. Amongst Protestant irenicists in Britain there was a sense that moderate Phillipists represented the best opportunity for Protestants to unify while the 'rigid Lutherans,' as Edwin Sandys described them, seemed to be more inclined to join with the Catholics to root out Calvinism.[16]

Perhaps no work better exemplifies transcultural and transnational influences on British militant Protestantism and British Protestant identity than the Huguenot anti-tyrant treatise *Vindiciae Contra Tyrannos*. The fourth section of the treatise was translated into English and printed in 1588 under the title *A Short Apologie for Christian Soldiers*. Printed in connection to an English campaign of support of Henry IV and the French Huguenots, the treatise posed the question as to whether it was 'lawfull' for neighbouring princes to 'send ayde' to the subjects of another prince who were 'either afflicted for Religion, or oppressed with tyrannie'. The significance of this section of *Vindiciae* appearing in English lies in its enunciation of resistance theory as a concept that spans borders and overrides particular polities. Other sections of the treatise addressed the sacred 'tripartite covenant' between people, king and God and implied that only a 'part' of a specific commonwealth – the subjects of a particular king – could lawfully rebel in order to maintain the covenant between God and people. These sections were nowhere to be found in *A Short Apologie*, as the arguments made in them were certain to have made Elizabeth uncomfortable. Instead *A Short Apologie* included only the section of the *Vindiciae* that justified military intervention against a tyrant who was an enemy of the true church. In this way, resistance theory during the Elizabethan period was transformed from something concerning the rights of inferior magistrates within a constitutional framework to something that extended to members of the true church throughout Christendom.

According to Quentin Skinner, the Huguenot theory of resistance, as represented by *Vindiciae*, represented a 'more radical theory of resistance' than theories articulated by British Calvinists such as Knox, Goodman, Ponet and Buchanan.[17] The introduction of Huguenot resistance theory also represents the internationalization of resistance theory in Britain. When Knox called upon the Scottish nobility to rebel in his *Appellation*, it was a call to arms specific to Scotland.[18] Buchanan's theories of resistance were framed within the laws of Scottish kingship. What the *Vindiciae* showed, through *A Short Apolgie*, was that the tyrant was not necessarily someone who violated the covenant between God and the people over which he ruled, but he could be any prince who oppressed the 'true religion' anywhere.

The central tenet of *A Short Apologie* was that 'it is manifest that the church of God is one, that Christ is the head of the church, whose members are so knitte and ioyned together, that the least of them cannot suffer violence, but that the whole must also greeve and sorrowe with it'.[19] It was incumbent upon all members of the true church to aid those other members who were afflicted by tyranny