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ARTICLES

REVIEWS

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Editorial: The Question of Scottish Independence

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The question of Scottish independence is complex and controversial. Undoubtedly accelerated by Brexit, and following Scotland's majority opposition to departure from the European Union, the coherence of the United Kingdom has become at least questionable. To add further complexity to the mix, 2023 has seen the apparent collapse of the majority position of the Scottish National Party and its place at the centre of Scottish politics in the Holyrood Parliament. For some time, the polls have been stuck at fifty-fifty in favour of and against independence. It would seem that Scotland today is a politically divided country.

This issue of the *SEI Journal* features essays by four very different writers, all of whom identify quite clearly with one of the major Christian denominations in Scotland — Episcopalian, Roman Catholic and Church of Scotland. Michael Russell, Gerard Carruthers and Doug Gay live and work in Scotland, whereas Nigel Biggar is a Church of England clergyman and academic, and a Scot by birth. Each of these writers has a very decided view on the matter of Scotland's future, and it has not been our intention to define any overall position, but rather to offer a discussion of different positions in the debate. We hope that all of the papers will be read with careful attention. What role do the churches have in the current debates, and what will be their position in any future Scotland, within or outside the UK? There can be no simple answers to such questions, but these papers may help to further the discussion and give more food for thought. One thing seems very clear. The next few years will be crucial for the future of Scotland, and the churches of the various Christian denominations will need to find their voices and positions in that future, and play their part in a rapidly changing and developing world in which Scotland will have its own unique role.

Scottish Independence

Michael Russell
President of the Scottish National Party

Being brought up as an Episcopalian in the douce wee seaside town of Troon in the 1960s, it was common to hear one's place of worship, and the congregation that attended it, collectively referred to as 'the English Kirk'. In terms of membership that description was not inaccurate. A majority of those who were active communicants hailed from outside Scotland, like my mother, who had been educated in Edinburgh from the age of nine but who was born in Abbots Langley, the village near Watford which had also produced the only English pope, albeit more than seven centuries earlier. Her father came from the same place, and was organist in the local Church of England parish church while still a teenager, as well as being a stalwart of the village cricket team.

For many of the families like mine who attended St Ninian's in Troon every Sunday, sang in the choir and volunteered for the various rotas and groups, there was no doubt a comforting familiarity with practices they may have experienced in England, including the use of the same hymn book, psalms and anthems, and a very similar prayer book. Vestments, church furnishings and even the architecture were largely indistinguishable, and the presence of English priests and bishops — in increasing numbers during my lifetime — was and is testament to the closeness of the relationship.

Nonetheless, some reminders of difference were also present. The liturgy for Holy Communion, particularly when it started to be modernised in the 1960s, was publicly and prominently authorised by Scottish bishops in the name of a Primus, not an Archbishop. In the Highlands and Islands there was the occasional nod to the existence of a Gaelic-language liturgy, and at coffee after services, or perhaps at vestry meetings or men's or women's guilds, there would be at least one voice which rather pedantically sought to insist that the Scottish Episcopal Church had different roots to the Anglican Church south of the border, and that being 'in full communion' with the Church of England did not and should not mean being governed by it, consciously or unconsciously.

The historical point is of course true. The Episcopal Church in Scotland has a good claim to be descended from the first reformed church in Scotland, coming into being in different circumstances from the Church of England not least because it did so in an independent and differently ruled country. The English Reformation started earlier and, although it was of course part of the

wider European movement, it was impelled by English dynastic politics. The Scottish Reformation of 1560 onwards was also connected to wider events, but its more localised imperatives were very different.

That history continued to diverge during the rest of the sixteenth century and for most of the seventeenth century. As Presbyterianism became firmly entrenched north of the border, the position of the Scottish Episcopal Church was marginal and at times its very existence was threatened. Meanwhile the Anglican Church was enjoying the advantages of being 'by law established'. History and theology together cement that difference, symbolised still by the position of the monarch, whose dual ecclesiastical conscience makes them an Anglican when south of the border, and moreover Supreme Governor of that church, but an ordinary Presbyterian when north of it, and with an accession oath — as we have recently seen — that enshrines this duality. The difference can also be seen in policy, with the Scottish Episcopal Church prayerfully but purposefully taking its own position on the key challenges of the time, including the issues of women's ordination and same-sex relationships.

It should therefore not be difficult, even for those who are vehemently opposed to Scottish independence as a political concept, to accept that such a difference in origin and narrative over several centuries has led to a continuing difference in governance and resulted in a difference in outlook. It is to be hoped that they can also appreciate that such differences do not impede a neighbourly and close relationship that is also an independent one in terms of decision making. The fact that it is a settled matter is shown by the lack of argument within the church for a financial and organisational realignment that would see the Scottish Episcopal Church absorbed into the Church of England and forced to accept the positions and decisions of the majority south of the border, irrespective of the view of the minority north of it.

The constitutional and political union of the UK lies in the original union of the crowns in 1603 and then in the union of the Parliaments in 1707. The latter as a matter of historical fact was in large part entered into because it would confer both individual economic advantage on the Scottish side, and national economic advantage for England.

Political moves to reconsider aspects of that union are nothing new. In the middle of the nineteenth century the Society for the Vindication of Scottish Rights had strong establishment backing and led in time to the re-establishment of the office of the Secretary of State for Scotland, and then to a growing debate about the right relationship of Scotland to the rest of the UK.

An early bill to grant Scotland 'Home Rule' received its second reading in the House of Commons as early as 1913, and successive innovations in

administrative devolution of power were followed in the second half of the twentieth century by a growing movement supporting political devolution of decision making and some legislation, leading eventually to the creation of a Scottish Parliament, which had limited powers transferred to it in 1999. The powers of that Parliament have since been increased by agreement with Westminster, most recently after the 2014 Scottish Independence Referendum, which came about as a result of the growing success of the Scottish National Party (SNP) in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries.

Although that referendum resulted in a 'No' vote of 55% compared with a 'Yes' vote of 45%, the issue of independence for Scotland has not gone away, and the arguments for that change continue to dominate Scottish politics. Opinion polls would suggest that despite the recent difficulties of the SNP, support for Scottish independence has not weakened since 2014, and on occasion since then it has been the majority view. The arguments regarding the matter can be loosely grouped into three areas — economic, international and democratic.

The question of whether or not the union remains of financial benefit to the two partners who forged it (and that union was a voluntary one and must remain so if it is to have any validity and credibility in a democracy) is often seen as the most important part of the independence case. However, obtaining a clear and definitive answer to the question about Scotland's financial position both within and potentially outwith the union is difficult.

The Government Expenditure and Revenue Scotland (GERS) figures that are issued on an annual basis by the Scottish Government are based on a snapshot and some very contentious estimates of the Scottish share of UK-wide expenditure and income — estimates that nationalists regard as seriously flawed. The figures are also distorted by assumptions about trade flows and the volatility of the price of oil. GERS outcomes are hotly disputed on either side of the argument, not least because of their origin. They were conceived of by a Conservative and Unionist Secretary of State, and the methodology is often questioned, as is the nature of any 'snapshot' in a situation in which the main levers of economic growth and well-being are not under the full control of Scottish institutions.

Although unionists argue that the figures demonstrate a dependence upon the UK without which Scotland would need to make substantial cuts to its budget, those who favour independence contend that all that the GERS figures demonstrate is how badly the Scottish economy fares when it is in large part run from south of the border, and with policies for which Scotland did not vote. Different policies and the use of all the tax-raising and public expenditure powers of a normal independent nation would, they argue, quickly produce a different and more positive outcome.

In addition, nationalists suggest that as half of the member states of the EU are either the same size as or smaller than Scotland, yet fare better in economic terms, the issue is not one of size but of failure to achieve full control of all the required economic and fiscal tools. Normality, they contend, lies in achieving that state, and abnormality lies in accepting complicated half measures that are hemmed in by a Westminster system that regards only its own Parliament as sovereign. Devolution is and always will be a delicate dance around that outdated but still strongly defended position, and moreover one that has been strengthened by the 'take back control' philosophy of Brexit.

Although Scotland is not a colony in any conventional sense, there are echoes of the colonial experience in this argument. Modern scholarship on the matter — for example, from India — suggests that the impoverishing nature of external rule and the export of resources to the controlling power is a major supporting argument for national independence, not least because of the major social effect in depressing the ability to make progress for the population in health, education and other social imperatives.

It is also true that, in nearly every colonial situation, one of the most regularly repeated British arguments against independence was the alleged inability of the colony to afford that status. That ground bass of opposition was used to argue against the independence of the American colonies in the late eighteenth century, and was still being used against nations as diverse as Malta, India and Singapore in the twentieth century.

In Scotland, those in favour of the union have developed this argument to claim that what they call the 'pooling and sharing' of resources and risk is greatly to Scotland's benefit both directly, in terms of the economy and the standard of living, and also in terms of reach and significance on a global basis. Yet, given the opaque nature of the fiscal flows in the relationship, what appears to some as 'sharing' may appear to others as 'removing' without there being any adequate recompense. There is also no adequate unionist response to the question of why such an arrangement is of advantage to England if, as is alleged, it costs so much.

It is fair to say that the economic argument is not likely to be decisively won by either side at any time in the future. Both sides are convinced that their own position on it is valid. Unionists do not believe that Scotland could flourish, or perhaps even survive, in the modern world, without being part of a larger UK, and they make dire economic predictions about the consequences if independence were to happen. However, nationalists ascribe to the union not only economic under-performance by a country rich in natural resources, with a high standard of education (Scotland is one of the best educated countries in Europe, based on the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's definition) and a significant

record of international trade, but also the social problems resulting from long-term under-investment and lack of strategic targeted capital spending. They argue that the resources available even to the devolved government are inadequate, and that they are restricted because of the Scottish Parliament's lack of full powers.

These arguments, although they change in terms of detail from time to time, have remained remarkably static in the modern era. Opinion polls suggest that there is a strong demand by voters for clear answers to these and other questions. However, as no authority on these matters is regarded by either side as unimpeachable, and as even the premise of the basic question — that is, that Scottish independence would and must be treated as a valid electoral choice — is disputed by unionists, it is hard to see how they could be resolved to universal satisfaction.

The discovery of significant quantities of oil and gas off Scotland's shores in the 1970s simply complicated the matter, with questions of geographical share, sovereignty over the sea bed, volatile prices and now climate change all entering the mix, as well as increasing evidence that oil funds were used by UK governments to pursue policies that not only failed to assist Scotland but also deliberately clouded the potential impact of this resource on the debate about the viability of an independent Scotland. That matter continues as we transition — as we must — towards a post-oil society, with Scotland having global potential for renewable energy generation and the development of the associated technology.

Connected to this argument is, of course, the second question about global reach and participation, an issue which has come particularly to the fore as a result of Brexit. Two areas of Scotland — the Western Isles and Shetland — voted against EU membership in the 1975 referendum. However, in 2016 the country, and each of the local authority counting areas, returned positive 'Remain' votes, with a national tally of 62% to 38% in favour of remaining in the EU. Yet the small percentage lead for withdrawal when the entire UK vote was taken into account meant that the UK as a whole left the EU after a tortuous process of negotiation. During that process the UK government secured a special place for Northern Ireland (which had also voted against leaving), but refused to consider any special treatment or status for Scotland, although the EU would have been prepared to discuss this issue.

The failure of Brexit to deliver any of the advantages claimed for it by the 'Leave' campaign, and the use of the repatriated powers to undermine the legislative autonomy of the Scottish Parliament, have both become major issues in the independence debate. In addition, a significant and well-remembered factor in the narrow victory of the No campaign in the 2014 Scottish Independence Referendum was the assertion made by those against

Scottish independence that Scotland would not be able to join the EU, something that was fiercely disputed at the time by nationalists, and which now even senior EU figures admit is simply not true. The irony of Scotland being told by the same people that it must leave the EU against its own wishes and best interests is also not lost on many of those who had been influenced by the opposite argument in 2014.

Nonetheless, it is important to consider — particularly if it is hard to get a conclusive answer to the economic case — the potential disadvantages and advantages of Scottish independence in terms of global reach and position.

It is virtually certain that Scotland would be able to join the EU, the only question being about the process. Although all candidate nations are required to conform to the requirements of the club, it is fair to say that some experts regard the accession process for Scotland as being more straightforward than in most cases, given that the country has observed the EU *acquis* for most of the last 50 years and is a mature democracy. In addition, the process of accession is always an incremental one, and it is likely that Scotland would benefit from starting on that path whenever it achieved independence.

Dire warnings about the loss of trade with the rest of the UK in the event of Scottish independence tend to founder on the fact that Scotland, as an accession state and then as an EU member, would be in exactly the same position as all other EU members in its trading relationship with the remainder of the UK, and therefore any difficulty that arose would be as a result of the remainder of the UK desiring it — a desire that would damage trade with all of the other EU members. Another factor to be added to the mix would be the dependence of England on Scottish-generated power.

A further objection that is made suggests that the Scottish position would be weakened internationally if it were no longer part of a nation with a seat on the UN Security Council. However, Ireland has shown how successful small countries can be in making significant contributions on the international stage, and of course that country is currently an elected member of the Security Council. It also plays a meaningful role in international peacekeeping and in European institutions.

Returning to the EU would also mean re-entering the single market, which would open trading doors that are currently closed or narrowed, and it would ease labour pressures, given the benefit that Scotland accrued before and would accrue again from freedom of movement. In addition, Scotland's citizens would benefit from the ease of travel within Europe and the opportunity to live and work in other European countries.

Of course there could be downsides, such as the likelihood of a reduction in the number of embassies compared with those currently operated by the UK, but small countries often share a diplomatic presence and also focus it more tightly on economic advantage and/or aid provision. In terms of defence, an independent Scotland would be likely to join NATO at an early date, but would also take the same non-nuclear stance as many other NATO members. For many supporters of independence, negotiation for the removal of nuclear weapons from Scotland would be an early priority.

Finally, the democratic argument that underpins all of these issues needs to be considered. Scotland entered into a voluntary union with England in 1707, and both countries ceased to exist when the new nation was born. It goes without saying that a voluntary union must be just that, and therefore there must be a pathway open to dissolving it should one or other party to the agreement wish to consider that move. Until recently this path was recognised and articulated — reluctantly but openly — by successive UK prime ministers. For example, Margaret Thatcher was clear that a vote by Scotland to leave the union would have to be recognised and acted upon, and the 2014 Scottish Independence Referendum took place as a result of an acknowledgement of that fact by David Cameron, even if he was initially slow to grant this.

However, since then the UK has moved from an attitude of reluctance to one of downright refusal. The Edinburgh agreement that underpinned the 2014 vote made no reference to what Conservative ministers now falsely claim to have been a 'once in a generation' vote. Indeed, during the campaign, politicians on both sides of the argument regularly referred to the possibility of another referendum being held on the matter at some future date. Even Theresa May, in her first refusal following an application for a Section 30 order by the Scottish Government in March 2017, appeared to countenance a referendum taking place at the end of the Brexit process, rather than in 20 or 30 years' time, which is the position of the current Secretary of State for Scotland.

The decision of the UK Supreme Court that a Section 30 order, granted by the UK Government, is needed for such a referendum (the issue of the constitution being reserved to a sovereign Westminster Parliament by that parliament itself) is no barrier provided that any UK government recognises that the request for such an order from a majority in the Scottish Parliament has to be the democratic trigger. Indeed that situation was implicitly accepted when the original Scotland Act became law in 1998.

This is all the more important because the government that is refusing to accept the need for a voluntary route to a decision about independence is one that the people of Scotland did not elect. In fact the last time that the Conservative party had a majority in a Scottish election was in 1955. The last

eight elections (at various levels of governance) in Scotland have been won by the left-of-centre SNP, the policy of which is to hold a second independence referendum arguing not just from the democratic mandate that the party has repeatedly received, but also on the basis that the people of Scotland, given their vote on Brexit, with the majority against it (a figure which is now even higher in polls), have a right to choose between EU or UK membership when the implications of that choice are clear, as they now are.

Refusing to accept that right strengthens the argument not just for getting rid of a Conservative government, but also for getting rid of a system in which the people of Scotland cannot give effect to their choice of how they should be governed — something that was guaranteed to them by the pre-devolution 1989 Claim of Right, which has since been approved by both Holyrood and Westminster.

Finally, there is a kind of ontological argument for Scottish independence. If there was no union now, would Scotland be actively seeking to join the rest of the UK — a UK that is outside the EU, with an outmoded constitution, a declining economy and a growing distance between itself and the international community? Most would agree that the answer to that question would be no, and an example of why this is so might be found in our own Scottish Episcopal Church.

The very existence of our denomination as a separate but integral part of the Anglican Communion demonstrates the fact that it is possible to move forward, on contentious matters as well as on agreed ones, in warm fellowship with our neighbours, wishing them the best at all times, but also remaining autonomous, strong in our right to choose for ourselves and to go on choosing.

In other words, if our position is at the very least not economically disadvantageous, if it secures for us a normal place of equality in the wider world, and if it conforms with our democratic wishes and values, then surely what is good enough for our church might also be good enough for our nation.

Useful and Useless:
Catholic Cultural Experience of Scotland

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For Scottish Roman Catholics, things were changing by the late 1990s, and seemingly quite radically. Increasingly, Catholics were making positive noises and interventions in the polity of Scotland and its potentialities. Cardinal Thomas Winning (1925–2001), Archbishop of Glasgow, was the most publicly identifiable and outspoken clergyman in Scotland, and it was guaranteed that he would be listened to attentively. Whether lauded for his outraged stance on issues such as poverty, or courting controversy with aspects of his moral conservativism (memorably, for instance, Section 28/2A on gay partnership), Winning was regarded as a centrally important voice. Paradoxically, the confidence of Scottish Catholicism, as exemplified by Winning, caused the nation's leading composer, Sir James Macmillan (1959–), to raise the spectre of anti-Catholicism at the end of the decade. He did so, though, precisely amid his 'palpable sense of optimism' as a Scottish Catholic delivering his lecture, 'Scotland's Shame', in August 1999 at the Edinburgh International Festival.

In this talk, Macmillan contended that now was the opportune moment to beard the national problem of deep hostility to his faith, an attitude that had been for too long and systematically evaded. The composer accused the Scottish press in particular, with its 'feature writers who regularly and vociferously attack Catholic belief and practice in unguarded visceral ways that would never see the light of day in a London quality newspaper'.[1] He also identified a widespread banal sectarianism, summed up in the view 'that everything would be hunky-dory if only we were to abolish Catholic schools', as well as more nakedly aggressive prejudice such as the vice-chairman of Rangers Football Club, Donald Findlay QC, filmed in May 1999 singing anti-Catholic songs that incorporated an anti-Irish slant in particular.[2] Part of Macmillan's confidence apparently sprang from his feeling that, in contrast

[1] James Macmillan, 'Scotland's Shame', in *Scotland*'s *Shame? Bigotry and Sectarianism in Modern Scotland*, ed. by Tom M. Devine (Edinburgh: Mainstream Publishing, 2000), p. 17.

[2] Macmillan, pp. 16–17.

to days of yore, it was no longer necessary among members of the Scottish Catholic community 'to keep one's head down'.[3]

Other signals of Scottish Catholic confidence were apparent around this time, too, such as the one-day conference hosted by the Centre for Theology and Public Issues at New College, University of Edinburgh, on 9 November 1996, the proceedings of which were subsequently published as *Catholicism and the Future of Scotland* (1997). It would be difficult to imagine a publication with such a title being issued by a Scottish university in the 1960s or 1970s. Among the contributors to this pamphlet, Tim Duffy, in considering 'the case for a Scottish Parliament', found an analogy between 'self-determination' and the 'principle of subsidiarity' that had a long history in Catholic social and philosophical thought, accentuated most recently by the loosening of centralised authority — in theory if not always in practice — as conceived by the Second Vatican Council (1962–1965).[4] The Labour MP (now Lord) John McFall (1944–) identified another long-standing idea in modern Catholic teaching as being of use to Scotland, namely that of the 'Common Good' — that is, all of humanity, regardless of species of belief, making common cause in its shared social and communitarian conditions.[5] What accounted for this Catholic outspokenness on national issues, indeed Catholics bringing confessional ideas to the secular table, in a way that was much more noticeable compared with even a decade and a half earlier? In a contribution to *Catholicism and the Future of Scotland*, the leading sociologist and former Catholic seminarian, David McCrone (1945–), provided a pointer. He identified a situation in which, in 1996, 'Catholics are, if anything, more likely to be in favour of Scottish independence (28%) than Protestants (19%)'. [6] Clearly, Scottish Catholics, compared with Protestants, felt increasingly more at ease in a Scotland conceivably cut loose from the British Westminster government. As reported in *The Tablet* (the leading weekly British Catholic publication), by the time of the Scottish Independence Referendum in 2014, around 57% of Catholics had voted in favour of

[3] Macmillan, p. 15.

[4] Tim Duffy, 'Church and Nation: A Catholic View', in *Catholicism and the Future of Scotland*, ed. by Gerard Hand and Andrew Morton (Edinburgh: Centre for Theology and Public Issues, 1997), p. 64.

[5] John McFall, 'A Politician's Personal Testimony', in *Catholicism and the Future of Scotland,* pp. 53–6.

[6] David McCrone, 'Catholics in Scotland: A Sociological View', in *Catholicism and the Future of Scotland*, p. 21.

separatism.[7] Catholic confidence in a more autonomous Scotland in the years leading up to the devolved parliament at Edinburgh (inaugurated in 1999), and through its subsequent existence, has remained high compared with only a few decades earlier. Strikingly, at the home of Celtic Football Club, with its predominantly — but far from exclusively — Catholic support, only a few years ago the fans displayed a banner featuring William Wallace (the fourteenth-century leader of the Scottish Wars of Independence, not the Lisbon Lion). In contrast, social media quite frequently features unionist, Rangers FC fans complaining about what they allege to be the Sinn Fein equivalent — the Scottish National Party (SNP). It would seem to be the case that whereas the core Rangers support has remained consistently British Unionist over the decades, the Celtic counterpart has increasingly added Scottish nationalism to its more traditional Irish nationalism during the last 30 years or so.

Alex Salmond (1954–), leader of the SNP (1990–2000, 2004–2014) and First Minister of Scotland (2007–2014), developed a particularly cordial relationship with Cardinal Winning, and explicitly opposed those who would abolish Catholic schools; indeed he also wished to 'celebrate' the achievements and the contribution made to the Scottish nation by those schools.[8] How different was Salmond's stance towards Catholicism compared with that of Billy Wolfe (1924–2010), a previous leader of the SNP (1969–1979). During the Falklands War, Wolfe implied that, in Argentina, fascism and Catholicism naturally walked hand in hand, and that it was imperative to protect the 'mainly Protestant and democratically minded Falklanders, mostly descendants of Scots'.[9] Wolfe here embodied a long-standing fear among twentieth-century Scottish Catholics that, if left to its own devices, an independent Scotland would become 'Ulsterised', and they would be under the heel of an aggressively prejudiced Protestant ascendancy. To be fair — and shedding light on the trajectory that is being sketched here – Wolfe later recanted and sincerely apologised for his unreasonable and hurtful views. However, his anti-Catholicism was far from gratuitously personal. It was conditioned by historical Scottish culture.

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[7] *The Tablet*, 25 September 2014: www.thetablet.co.uk/news/3925/majority-of-catholics-voted-for-independence.

[8] See, for example, a discussion of Salmond's views in Stephen J. McKinney and James C. Conroy, 'The Continued Existence of State-Funded Catholic Schools in Scotland', *Comparative Education*, 51 (2015), 105–17.

[9] David Torrance, 'Letters Reveal SNP Crisis over President's Anti Catholic Diatribes', *The Times*, 11 September 2010.

Here I cannot help but become somewhat anecdotal. As a Scottish Catholic I was aware of my confessional and national standing from a very young age, even as I was far from really understanding it. I was brought up in Clydebank in the west of Scotland, and my father worked for John Brown and Company, the famous shipbuilders. In the 1960s it was the 'yard', and not the council, that owned our tenement buildings in Whitecrook Street in the town, and from around the age of four I remember being told by some of my playmates 'This isn't your country!' Probably these children did not comprehend any more than I did what was being said, but they were mouthpieces — indeed tradition-bearers — for the anti-Catholicism that was rife in the shipyards and other industrial factories. Whenever anyone uses the term 'Red Clydeside', I tend to mutter to myself 'Orange Clydeside, more like'. We were one of a minority of Catholic families in our street, as Brown's employed Catholics only very sparingly. On leaving the merchant marine in 1960, my father obtained his position as a maintenance fitter in part due to impeccable references, but more because his Protestant uncle 'spoke' for him, as the parlance went, including assuring management that he was not unduly fond of alcohol (unlike so many of the other Catholics, especially those with Irish genes, so the implication clearly ran). I suspect that my father's surname, which was Scottish, also helped, although his mother's family were nineteenth-century emigrants from County Donegal. My father had a certain engineering ingenuity, and in 1967 he invented a tool for use by the firm, which was thereafter routinely adopted, and for which he was given a bonus of £3. Nonetheless, he only ever reached the status of chargehand, and was told that he could never become a foreman because he was not a Protestant. What seems remarkable to me now, but did not at the time when I heard about such conversations, was how accepting my father and his fellow Catholics were of their situation. That was just 'the reality'.

I remember sometimes being at Mass at lunchtime on Holidays of Obligation with my mother, and turning round to see my father and half a dozen of his colleagues standing at the back of Our Holy Redeemer church. They did not want to sit on the pews in their grimy boilersuits, and were also so stationed for the purpose of making a quick getaway back to the yard, having sacrificed their meagre 35-minute lunch break, any stretching of which would have elicited no sympathy from the managers, especially not for vulgarly pursuing their popish idolatry. Later, for a brief period in the summer of 1982 and before going to university, I worked as a labourer for Brown's. The foreman, an elder of the Kirk, had a distinct fondness for young men, and I think this was why I was one of two Catholics (out of a dozen men) in his employ. I had kept quiet about my university place, and at the end of the summer I was offered my position at Brown's on a permanent basis. When I turned it down and gave the reason, I was cheerfully told by

another labourer 'I didnae think that somebody fae your background […]'. It was clear what he was driving at, as obvious as the main noticeboard, which in that year of the visit of Pope John Paul II displayed a garish poster crying out 'No Pope of Rome!' This went entirely unchecked by management, and indeed was quite probably placed there by said management.

My family's national loyalties — to Britain as much as to Scotland — were called into question elsewhere as my mother, who was of Italian extraction, suffered racist abuse when she worked in the UCBS biscuit factory in Clydebank. Pointed remarks were made to her about her uncle's experience during the Second World War, when while out in his civvies he had been set upon by a Glasgow mob for being 'an Eyetie'. The unfortunate man had only recently been evacuated from Dunkirk as part of the British Expeditionary Force. My grandfather, Alfredo Tartaglia, had served in both the Italian cavalry and the British army prior to the outbreak of the war. He, like so many others, was interned for a period on the Isle of Man. His crucifix, which was crafted from discarded scraps of wood and tin, remains a precious heirloom within my family, and is a reminder of the one positive thing we had in terms of identity — our faith — at a time when both Scotland and Britain despised us. Earlier in her employment career, in the 1950s, my mother was part of a tiny Catholic minority at Collins the publishing firm in Glasgow (so many of the 'good' industries were well known for allowing access to only a very few Catholics, or for excluding them altogether). She enjoyed her time at Collins, and qualified as a fully trained book-binder, but it was made plain to her that her religion (and probably her gender, too) would disbar her from any significant promotion within the firm — a familiar story. She would recall that even people whom she liked in the firm, and those with whom she was on ostensibly friendly terms, made wilfully ignorant, provocative remarks about the beliefs and practices of her religion. These comments were not personal — they were about her faith, and that was self-evidently fair game!

My own experiences of being discriminated against because of my religion amount to little more than being abused as a 'Fenian' or 'Taig' when, prior to my time at Brown's, I was working for a Clydebank printing firm, or by individuals in pubs who involved me in political and religious bar-room debate. One memorable incident occurred when I was playing hockey for Clydebank College, and in an east coast pub after a game the barman wanted to find out how many of us were Catholics. He wanted to keep this tally because, as he said, the aftergame pies were reserved for Protestants. Whether or not this was intended as a joke by our jovial host, it was met by our team captain (who was also a Boys Brigade captain) with incandescent rage. I am aware of how widespread 'soft sectarianism' is, and how far up Scottish life it travels, even today — for instance, in the Burns movement (I

work some of the time as a scholar of Robert Burns), in academia, and at respectable middle-class and upper-working-class association events. In such contexts, remarks have been made which go over the head of my 'non-Catholic' friends even as they have 'heard' the comments, so that one wonders 'Am I being over-sensitive, or is anti-Catholicism the last acceptable prejudice?' There was one incident, however, when a Presbyterian friend was more outraged than I was. This occurred when an academic and SNP activist, who was talking to us in 2017 in that bastion of West End Glasgow respectability, 'The Chip', referred to the former Labour MP, Jim Murphy, as 'Genuflecting Jim'. The anti-Catholicism of our nationalist 'colleague' was apparently stoked by Mr Murphy's involvement in the 2014 'No' campaign. Here one might wonder, too, what was being said about Labour from the SNP perspective, where there was perhaps some composite bile being produced. James Queenan, my headmaster at Our Holy Redeemer Primary School in Clydebank, was Labour Party Provost of the district authority for a period. He was emblematic of the kind of 'belonging' — school, church and Labour Party (and also in the case of many manual workers, such as my father, trade union) — that provided for people such as me a positive, comfortable sense of natural community, even as we were also aware of the surrounding culture of heavy industry and of 'officialdom', and their antipathy towards our denomination.

If in recent years there seems to have been some change in the 'acceptance' of Scottish Catholics, noticeable particularly in positive discussion of Catholic schools, the latter area continues to throw up some very dubious 'logic'. One instance was the response by a journalist in *The Times (Scotland)* to repeated anti-Catholic graffiti ('All Taigs are Targets') during the period 2020–2021. She suggested that the obvious solution to such awfulness was to end Catholic schooling. Do away with the victim, do away with the crime — it was quite simple. Many among the middle classes see it as 'common sense' that Catholic schools should be expunged, since these schools segregate children from an early age in a rather arbitrary fashion. However, the same people raise no objections to private schools, or for that matter to Jewish or Episcopalian schools, which do exist in Scotland (one suspects that opponents of Catholic schools are also probably wary of occasionally mooted dedicated Muslim schooling where similar narratives of superiority and alienness can be deployed). Perhaps the ending of denominational schooling might, in the past at least, have in a strange way worked to the advantage of Catholics, in the helpful dispelling of their abstruse saintly and theological nomenclature under which, so far as many Scots were concerned, 'God knows what' goes on!

When I was a postgraduate, a retired manager at Rolls Royce had returned as a student to the University of Glasgow in 1988, aged sixty-nine.

He expressed surprise that at my school, St Andrew's RC Secondary School in Clydebank, the same Ordinary and Higher-grade courses were offered as in the non-denominational sector. This very pleasant elderly man became a friend with whom I stayed in touch throughout the rest of his life, but at the time of my revelation to him I could not help remembering our careers master at St Andrew's telling the fourth-year boys who were looking to move on at the end of the year, 'No point in applying for an apprenticeship there, lads, your face won't fit'. These days it is interesting to note a different, more overarching anti-religious impetus in Scotland, in the UK and elsewhere. Today I find myself often enough making common cultural cause with Presbyterians, Episcopalians and others in the face of aggressive and frankly fanatical secular humanists who wish to drive faith groups from public view, and effectively to cancel them. Often the cry is that faith folk are 'unelected', when society is more complex in what ought to be its rightful representation in the civic square, rather than comprising solely those voices that have been accredited via the ballot box.

National belonging, as the foregoing account attempts to suggest, is not necessarily straightforward for a Catholic in Scotland and Britain. Historically, and in a sense logically, Catholics were — and arguably remain — effectively debarred from some political offices and functions. In recent history, Tony Blair only became a Catholic after his career as prime minister of the UK was over. Often tipped as the next leader of the Labour Party and as a potential prime minister, Catholic Andy Burnham will be an interesting religious test case in point should these things come to pass.[10] There has been no testing of the reality, which would include the prime minister advising the monarch, who is head of the Church of England, on the appointment of Church of England bishops, among other things. A nice point has been made that technically the Catholic Emancipation Act of 1829 included within its safeguarding clauses that no Catholic could be so involved in episcopal appointment, and this section of the act has never been repealed.[11] It would be genuinely objectively interesting to see a UK Catholic prime minister in action — indeed to see if he or she *could* act in such

[10] I find rather spurious the claims that Boris Johnson was the first Catholic prime minister of the UK. Although he was baptised in the church and married (for the third time) in a Catholic ceremony, he has never practised or identified as Catholic; see www.scottishcatholic.com/the-last-catholic-prime-minister/#:~:text=James%20Bundy%20examines%20the%20legacy,Minister%20of%20the%20United%20Kingdom.

[11] www.legalcheek.com/2021/06/this-one-crazy-law-from-1829-could-topple-our-newly-married-prime-minister/

instances (undoubtedly there would be complaints, and undoubtedly no Catholic prejudice would be brought to the process).[12] For many years I was a member of the Labour Party, until I left in 2003 over my objection to the invasion of Iraq. My most core set of political principles, more so even than socialist ones, are republican (I am a great admirer of Thomas Paine, who was so crucial to the thinking of the American and French revolutions in the eighteenth century). Recently, when I told an educated middle-class Scot of my professional acquaintance that I was a republican, he replied, 'Ah, an Irish Republican'. 'No', I said, 'just a republican'. It was clear that once again my known religious/ethnic affiliation was being brought into things. My republicanism is in fact one of the reasons why I am sceptical about both nationalism and unionism. Official SNP party policy, like that of their unionist opponents, includes the retention of the British monarchy. When I point this out to nationalists I am often met with the exasperated rejoinder that this is just an electoral position, and that once independence for Scotland has been gained, the House of Windsor will be removed from Scottish polity. I have two things to say in response to this — first, I wish then that this would be the honestly stated policy, and second, such wiping out of the monarchy might be easier said than done — legally and practically — in an independent Scotland.[13] For one thing, presumably the SNP maintains its stance on retaining the monarchy because it is currently seeking to garner votes, and will want the support of these same royalist voters for its party in a post-independent Scotland.[14]

Scotland's medieval past, obviously enough, was Roman Catholic. During the twentieth century the loss of this was particularly lamented by one strong line of cultural nationalism since, it was argued, it had led pretty much consequentially to Protestant-glued Great Britain. Somewhat crudely, Calvinist Scots, in their individualism, were seen as a result of this newly awakened deep nostalgia for the medieval period as inevitably capitalist (in

[12] It should be acknowledged that the office of Lord Chamberlain (essentially chief official to the Royal Family) was occupied for the first time since the Reformation, from 1998 to 2000, by a Catholic, Lord Camoys (1940–2023).

[13] www.heraldscotland.com/politics/23219191.poll-scots-favour-republic-king-charles-yes-vote/.

[14] For an interestingly nuanced poll from YouGov on this topic, see https://yougov.co.uk/topics/politics/articles-reports/2022/10/11/do-scots-want-keep-monarchy-independent-scotland

a somewhat facile version of the Weber–Tawney thesis).[15] It was only a short step from this view to seeing Scottish Protestantism's inevitable incorporation of Scotland into Great Britain, where the juicy fruits of English-originated — but enthusiastically Scottish — worldwide Empire could be enjoyed. Such was the picture painted of the historical trajectory of the Scot by George Douglas Brown (1869–1902) in his novel *The House with the Green Shutters* (1901). This text set out the case that recent Scottish literature/culture was most wilfully misleading in its depiction of the grounded, essentially rural Scot of the 'Kailyard' school of fiction in the 1880s and 1890s (this movement was hugely popular across the English-speaking world, particularly in the colonies, and was supposedly the forerunner of the cosy, couthy *Sunday Post* and the 'Brigadoon' image of Scotland). Instead of this self-affirming fantasy, Brown suggested, we ought to bring into proper view the aggressively rapacious Scot with his cunning engineering mind, devoid of culture (as puritanical Calvinism was not keen on impractical art), or in other words the colonial Scot manifesting all of his awful opportunistic British Protestantism.[16] This was the Whig progressivist, British exceptionalist version of history inverted or ca'd at the knees. Laugh-out-loud funny and rather cartoonish, although simultaneously clever in its satirical panache, *The House with the Green Shutters* was the work of a personally embittered, partly Oxford-educated Scot. Nonetheless, Douglas Brown's national characterisation came to be influential, and was taken very seriously amid the so-called Scottish literary 'Renaissance' from the 1920s onwards. The chief figure of that cultural movement was the poet Hugh MacDiarmid (Christopher Murray Grieve, 1892–1978), who hoped that immigration from Ireland might be speeded

[15] For the crudity of the Weber–Tawney thesis in itself, see Winthrop S. Hudson, 'The Weber Thesis Re-examined', *Church History*, 57 (1988), Supplement: Centennial Issue, 56–67.

[16] Such Scotophobia stands in a long tradition dating back to the eighteenth century, when writers such as Samuel Johnson and Charles Churchill saw the Scottish people as gobbling up the benefits of union with England, displacing Englishmen from positions that they ought to occupy, and giving little in return. Up to and beyond Douglas Brown's time, it also included T. H. W. Crosland's *The Unspeakable Scot* (London: Stanley Paul & Co., 1902), which was published remarkably close in time to the former's novel, as well as the popular prejudice against recent Scottish prime ministers of the UK, namely Gordon Brown and even (in his somewhat debatable Scottishness) Tony Blair. See Gerard Carruthers, 'Scotland in Britain', in *The Nation in British Literature and Culture*, ed. by Andrew Murphy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023), pp. 51–67.

up so that, with a steady influx of Catholics, Scotland would become less crassly puritanical.[17] On the one hand a somewhat debatable proposition is that Irish Catholicism is devoid of puritanical elements, but on the other hand, MacDiarmid was commendably speaking out within a milieu that repeatedly saw the Church of Scotland condemning the 'alien' menace that was posed to Scotland by Irish immigration.[18] In his *Scottish Journey* (1935), Edwin Muir (1887–1959), who was an ally of MacDiarmid, saw this author embark on a bleak anthropological tour in which he witnessed a bleak Scotland blighted by the Industrial Revolution and Protestantism. Muir found only very few pockets of positive cultural relief, including Carfin Grotto in the midst of industrial Lanarkshire, a Catholic shrine that had been established in the 1920s by Monsignor Thomas Taylor (1873–1963). Emblematic of all that Muir saw as missing, and surrounded by huge historical deficit, the Marian shrine had often harnessed in its development through the period of the Great Depression the labour of the unemployed. Muir's admiration for Carfin, Taylor and the other Catholics behind it is clear as he sees the humble and wonderful faith that accomplished it as radiant in a way not comprehended by Protestant Scotland: 'It is a part not only of Scotland but of a whole world of which Scotland knows nothing. It is as international as the industrial region that surrounds it, but in a completely different way'.[19] Muir, a great Europhile, saw Scotland (and Britain) as being largely cut off from much of the traditional cultural vitality of Europe. Scotland, with its grim Calvinist Protestant conditioning, was in his view lamentable. Even as the gargantuan struggle against the Nazis was pursued by Britain and her allies, Muir sustained his theme of disastrously inhuman Scottish Calvinism, most notoriously in his poem 'Scotland 1941':

> We were a tribe, a family, a people.
> Wallace and Bruce guard now a painted field,
> And all may read the folio of our fable,
> Peruse the sword, the sceptre and the shield.
> A simple sky roofed in that rustic day,
> The busy corn-fields and the haunted holms,
> The green road winding up the ferny brae.
> But Knox and Melville clapped their preaching palms
> And bundled all the harvesters away,

[17] See, for instance, Richard A. Barlow, *Modern Irish and Scottish Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2023), especially pp. 93–138.

[18] See David Ritchie, 'The Civil Magistrate: The Scottish Office and the Anti-Irish Campaign, 1922–29', *Innes Review*, 63 (2012), 48–76.

[19] Edwin Muir, *Scottish Journey* (London: Flamingo, 1985), p. 177.

Hoodicrow Peden in the blighted corn
Hacked with his rusty beak the starving haulms.
Out of that desolation we were born.[20]

Never formally committed to Scottish nationalism, or in fact to Catholicism or any organised religion, Muir believed — more or less — that the Scottish nation was irreparably lost, never to be brought back from its consummate British-Protestant-state benightedness. The more theoretically hopeful MacDiarmid, looking longingly both for the potential revival of Scots and Gaelic as culturally energising literary languages, and for Irish immigration, became furious with Edwin Muir's despair. Sharing a similar outlook to Muir, although expressing it even more vehemently, Fionn MacColla (Thomas Macdonald, 1906–1975) was a former Church of Scotland teacher in Palestine who converted to Catholicism and was a stalwart of the early SNP. Like another Catholic convert, Compton Mackenzie (1883–1972), co-founder of the National Party of Scotland (which eventually merged with the Scottish Party to form the SNP), MacColla hoped that Scotland might find a way forward (paradoxically enough) to retrieve something of its Catholic past. From the 1930s, having largely retreated to the Catholic enclave of Barra in the Western Isles, and often espousing Jacobitism, Mackenzie imagined a non-Protestant Scotland. From Barra he produced *Catholicism and Scotland* (1934), which among other things hymned 'the vitality of the Irish nation in the twentieth century, which makes every Scots patriot blush with shame'.[21] Rather like my father and his colleagues in heavy industry a few decades later, Mackenzie and his colleagues found Scotland in the context of its inter-dependent historic, religious and political culture extremely problematic. Imaginatively, however, these literati (including previous cultural activists involved in reviving Scottish culture, notably Robert Burns and Walter Scott) were not devoid of success in their dissent towards British Scotland. Celticism (including Celtic Football Club),

[20] www.poetrynook.com/poem/scotland-1941

[21] Compton Mackenzie, *Catholicism and Scotland* (London: George Routledge, 1936): https://books.google.co.uk/books?id=ChFDEAAAQBAJ&pg=PT15&lpg=PT15&dq=the+vitality+of+the+Irish+nation+in+the+twentieth+century,+which+makes+every+Scottish+patriot+blush+with+shame&source=bl&ots=OlLmGwMGZL&sig=ACfU3U2gRR3aQ0nJSAOEMb3rYW6zyNH6Ww&hl=en&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwjQkJGFjf78AhUwQUEAHao4AwwQ6AF6BAgTEAM#v=onepage&q=the%20vitality%20of%20the%20Irish%20nation%20in%20the%20twentieth%20century%2C%20which%20makes%20every%20Scottish%20patriot%20blush%20with%20shame&f=false

Jacobitism, Mary Queen of Scots and a comparative sympathy for previously down-trodden, colonised cousins in Ireland (these days perhaps more widespread than ever) all make for a cultural landscape in the Scotland of today that is to some extent, we might say, crypto-Catholic. In fact really all we are talking about is a country — Scotland — that is readily recycling and reutilising ideas and images from its historic past when issues of official state worship or royal dynasty are these days of little actual (overarching) import to the practical business of real politics.

What, then, of the present moment and the attitude that a Catholic might adopt towards Scotland either independent from or continuing in union with Britain? Increasingly, there is some consensus that Westminster in its heavily centralised working is unfit for purpose. We have had another round of Conservative sleaze from 2022, flagrant breaches of the ministerial code, and the most appalling financial mismanagement (with future inquiry also likely to show gross mishandling of the COVID-19 pandemic in Britain, including corrupt practices in the procurement process for protective equipment). It may be the case that the Holyrood administration handled the public health crisis better in general, but there are long-term questions about its running of the National Health Service and of care homes, and also about the state of dentistry during and even before the pandemic. The Scottish government record on transport infrastructure, education and child poverty is not good. The SNP has had its share of financial and sexual scandals in recent years, too, including party infighting and vendettas seen in the prosecution of Alex Salmond (who as a result is no longer an SNP member) through the courts. As a result, the number of people who were once starry-eyed about Nicola Sturgeon and her administration seems to be diminishing. We see something of this effect, certainly, in the controversy surrounding the Gender Recognition Act.

To many Catholics (and numerous others), the SNP along with others in the Holyrood bubble, especially the coalition allies of the governing party, namely the Greens, seem intent on pursuing an agenda of niche metropolitan cultural issues and identity politics.[22] What about seriously tackling the issues around poverty that feature in a depressingly unaltering index of multiple deprivation (in which, incidentally, areas with large Catholic populations feature disproportionately)? Again, why are the Greens so intent on immediate, zero-tolerance approaches to carbon emissions when, it might be countered, this is unrealistic amid a hugely vulnerable Scottish economy? We are told that the country is well equipped to be a world leader in renewable energy, but the infrastructure is still decades away from

[22] www.thetimes.co.uk/article/two-thirds-of-voters-oppose-snps-gender-reform-plans-d8wh3wh9w

enabling this to actually be achieved. There is, too, the undoubted economic disaster that is Brexit. Scotland, like London and various other parts of England, voted to remain in the European Union. But what about a future independent Scotland seeking to rejoin Europe, and in the process presumably having trade borders and tariffs with non-European England? Assuming, although this is by no means certain, that Scotland would be allowed re-entry to the common market, would this not be to repeat the mistake of Brexit, by cutting off truly free trade with our most important trading neighbour, namely England? Or would there be some kind of 'backstop' deal, as in the case of Northern Ireland? If so, that certainly does not augur well. One of the things that was least convincing about the nationalist case in 2014 concerned the currency, and next time around the independence case would continue to be that Scotland for some indeterminate time would utilise sterling. However, new members are not admitted to the EU if they use another nation's currency. The best proposition for the future Scottish independence campaign, whenever that happens, would be the adoption of the euro; this is not the current SNP position. However, even then, linkage to the euro without EU membership also raises questions about how much of a reality financial freedom (i.e., practical independent sovereignty with a Scottish central bank) could be. For this Catholic, the prospect of Scottish independence under the circumstances envisaged by the SNP and others is just as dispiriting as the current arrangement of being ruled over by a too often dysfunctional, Brexit-hedged Westminster.

Formally, theologically we might say, the Catholic position on nations and 'nationalism' is today much as it has always been. We see this in Pope Francis's recent 'Encyclical Letter: Fratelli Tutti: On Fraternity and Social Friendship' (2020).[23] This commends in effect a mental state for humanity of being 'without borders' and the need for 'the care for creation' universally and collectively by all of the human race. What might seem platitudinous is in fact simply profound, and Francis's concerns related specifically to recent events at whose centre Britain stood:

> For decades, it seemed that the world had learned a lesson from its many wars and disasters, and was slowly moving towards various forms of integration. For example, there was the dream of a united Europe, capable of acknowledging its shared roots and rejoicing in its rich diversity. We think of the firm conviction

23 www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20201003_enciclica-fratelli-tutti.html

> of the founders of the European Union, who envisioned a future based on the capacity to work together in bridging divisions and in fostering peace and fellowship between all the peoples of this continent. […]
>
> Our own days, however, seem to be showing signs of a certain regression. Ancient conflicts thought long buried are breaking out anew, while instances of a myopic, extremist, resentful and aggressive nationalism are on the rise.

It would seem obvious that it is British nationalism (i.e., Brexit) that Francis has in mind here. However, Scottish nationalism post Brexit suddenly, although arguably through no fault of its own, is part of a chain of fragmentation in which the post-1980s nationalist mantra of 'Scotland in Europe' is problematic. Beginning with the classic account of Scottish philosophical, education and cultural traditions, namely *The Democratic Intellect* (1961) by George Davie (1912–2007), a line of thought developed that reimagined Scotland as an essentially European nation. Davie's clever book was rather exclusive in positing what he saw as 'Presbyterian ethics' at the heart of this European Scotland, but let such problematics pass. Despite longstanding (and today still powerful) Euroscepticism within Scottish nationalism, the SNP skilfully developed a narrative of Scotland as a small, modern, muscular, resource-rich nation in Europe. The likes of Ireland and Norway were, and still are, here referenced in relation to wider economic and cultural arrangements, whether these are in the context of the EU or the Nordic Council. All of this was entirely reasonable, until Brexit painfully hedged the logic of this position with multiple impracticalities, both present and future. Cut off from Europe, a future Scotland could conceivably also be somewhat cut off from England. The means of being commendably 'without borders', in Francis's words, might simply be unavailable to Scotland. Coming out of the COVID-19 pandemic and in a situation where we are manifestly failing as a species in the stewardship of creation, macro-cultural and macro-economic conditions currently pose a series of existential questions that are difficult to answer.

Neither the Catholic church nor the experience of Catholics in Scotland can offer any clear direction on whether or not the individual Catholic, or indeed anyone else, ought to be a nationalist, a unionist, or adopt some other variety of political outlook. Currently, and for the reasons outlined above, levels of optimism about a future fully autonomous Scotland would not rationally be high, but people are nonetheless entitled to be gratuitously optimistic (in one sense this is what the Holy Spirit teaches us to be). We need to live in some political form, and I have a hunch that in future, perhaps many decades down the line, our constitutional realities will be transformed

out of all recognition. The present is just too 'presentist'. Ironically, at a time when we are hearing from many sides that moral authority is utterly diminished, we seem to be in a position where our culture and society often adopt a searingly condescending, judgemental view of the past. Reassuringly, this overweening certainty that we are more 'right' in our views than any previous generation is the kind of teleological fallacy in which humans have always indulged. No doubt the process of moral discernment is always a work in progress, and so too are our political and all other institutions. In the present moment, the tone of political and cultural difference (massively amplified by the fairly recent opportunities provided by social media) is often ungenerous and bad-tempered. Catholics, like other Christians, and like folk of all other faiths or none, need to realise this, to tolerate difference better and always to listen to one another. As it is, we continue to find new ways to batter the broken body of Christ. Ultimately, whether in politics or anything else, it ought to be all a matter of good faith with one another and with ourselves.

Scottish Independence and the Churches Ten Years On: Reflections on Low-Trust, Hight-Anxiety Politics

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> The rose of all the world is not for me.
> I want for my part
> Only the little white rose of Scotland
> That smells sharp and sweet—and breaks the heart.[24]
>
> When and how does the love of mother tongue,
> the love of my little corner of ground
> become the nation thing?[25]

When I talk about nationalism in seminars at universities or in churches, I often begin with these two quotes. The first is from Scotland's most famous twentieth-century poet, Hugh MacDiarmid (the pseudonym of Christopher Murray Grieve, 1892–1978), who in the 1920s was famously expelled from the Communist Party for being a nationalist, and from the Nation Party of Scotland — the forerunner of today's Scottish National Party (SNP) — for being a communist. If you didn't know MacDiarmid, with both his cosmic humanism and his socialist internationalism, the quote could be viewed as peevish and parochial. I read it as marking a humbler sense of desire for and attachment to what is local and close, familiar and precious. It also reminds me of the Gaelic poet Fearghas MacFhionnlaigh's remarkable long sustained poem 'The Midge', which provoked my own decisive intellectual and theological turn towards Scottish nationalism at the age of 19.[26] After an epic exploration of themes in history and culture,

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[24] Hugh MacDiarmid, 'The Little White Rose', in *Selected Poetry*, ed. by Alan Riach and Michael Grieve (Manchester: Carcanet Press, 1992). See also Hugh MacDiarmid, 'Scotland Small?', excerpt from 'Dìreadh I', in *Complete Poems*, II (Manchester: Carcanet Press, 1994).

[25] Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *Nationalism and the Imagination* (Calcutta: Seagull Books, 2010), p. 13.

[26] Published in *Cencrastus*, 10 (1982), 28–33; Professor Ruaraidh MacThomais (Derek Thomson) described it as 'probably the

existentialist philosophy and biblical theology, there is a passage near the end that echoes MacDiarmid, although with an added Gaelic sensibility: [27]

> I am small, and I like the small things:
> the buried seed that splits the sidewalk;
> the water-drop that devours the stone;
> the grain of sand that inters the pyramid;
> the first bird that welcomes the sun;
> the little country, the little language;
> the word of truth that is heavier than the World.

I like the other quote, from Gayatri Spivak's 2010 essay 'Nationalism and the Imagination', for two reasons. I like the way this post-colonial Marxist scholar here sounds almost quizzical, wondering aloud about the affective inflation and progression that takes place between love of mother tongue and neighbourhood and 'the nation thing'. This quote is also important for me because its love language, along with MacDiarmid's 'I want', moves us into an Augustinian register of love and desire, which I shall return to below.

There is no way to wrestle with the subject of nationalism without also wrestling with the vexed question of definitions. In his 1991 text, *Imagined Communities*, which is still one of the most influential studies of nationalism, Benedict Anderson observed that '[n]ation, nationality, nationalism – all have proved notoriously difficult to define, let alone to analyse'. [28] Definitions of nationalism matter because, in very many cases, they come with either a built-in ethical deficit or a built-in ethical surplus. An example of the first can be found in Stephen Grosby's *Nationalism: A Very Short Introduction*: [29]

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most exciting and interesting long sustained poem to be published in Gaelic this century'. A Dutch translation also appeared in 1982, reflecting the deep influence of Dutch neo-Calvinism on MacFhionnlaigh, in particular the work of Hermann Doyeweerd: https://gobha-uisge.blogspot.com/2014/04/the-midge-1.html

[27] This is, however, not to be confused with the mindset bitterly satirised by Tom Buchan in 'Scotland the Wee': www.scottishpoetrylibrary.org.uk/poem/scotland-wee/

[28] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (London: Verso, 1991), p. 2.

[29] Stephen Grosby, *Nationalism: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 17.

> When one divides the world into two irreconcilable and warring camps – one's own nation in opposition to all other nations – where the latter are viewed as one's own implacable enemies, then, in contrast to patriotism, there is the ideology of nationalism. Nationalism repudiates civility and the differences that it tolerates by attempting to eliminate all differing views and interests for the sake of one vision of what the nation has been and should be.

Grosby's move here acts as what Richard Rorty used to call 'a conversation stopper', and he also repeats the simplistic 'nationalism bad, patriotism good' trope.[30] By contrast, the Israeli scholar Yoram Hazony, a proponent of what is being dubbed 'national conservatism', proposes a definition of nationalism that has a built-in ethical surplus: 'In my father's house I was taught that to be a nationalist is a virtue'.[31]

My argument here is that we should reject both of these positions and be guided instead by two key moves from the work of Jonathan Hearn, the Edinburgh-based anthropologist, in his lucid volume *Rethinking Nationalism*,[32] published in 2006. Hearn takes a lead from Michael Billig's coining of the term 'banal nationalism' in 1995,[33] and he argues that rather than exoticising, othering and stigmatising nationalism, it makes more sense to notice how ubiquitous it is and to recognise that it forms 'part of the normal functioning of democratic regimes'.[34] Hearn views 'the politics of stable democratic regimes as the routinization rather than the overcoming of nationalism' (p. 145), arguing that 'in stable democratic regimes this process of nationalism is very deeply embedded in civil society and electoral systems and not simply an elite or state-led process. It is part of the normal functioning of democratic regimes' (p. 165). In his view:

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[30] Cf. Doug Gay, 'Patriotism Good - Nationalism Bad? The News from Scotland', Modern Believing, 53 (2012); the same unfortunate opposition is proposed by Luke Bretherton in *Christianity and Contemporary Politics* (London: Routledge, 2010), p. 134.

[31] Yoram Hazony, *The Virtue of Nationalism* (New York: Basic Books, 2018), p. 12.

[32] Jonathan Hearn, *Rethinking Nationalism* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006).

[33] Michael Billig, *Banal Nationalism* (New York: Sage, 1995).

[34] Hearn, 2006, p. 165.

> Liberal democracies do not so much transcend nationalism as domesticate it, routinizing its dynamic by channelling it through core political institutions. On the one hand, nationalism is seriously altered by this context, de-fanged for the most part and rendered less dangerous. But on the other hand it is an indispensable aspect of the state's ongoing need for legitimacy and inevitable competition between social groups to define the wider society of which they are members. … Nationalism is a basic part of how relatively stable democracies legitimate and re-legitimate themselves. (p. 166)

If Hearn's first move[35] is to 'normalise' nationalism, his second move is to 'relativise' or parse it. Having recognised the difficulties of definition, his own move, which I think is critically and analytically highly persuasive, is to suggest that we approach nationalism as a practice of 'claim making'. He proposes that 'Nationalism is the making of combined claims, on behalf of a population, to identity, to jurisdiction and to territory',[11] and he suggests that 'To be nationalism, these three kinds of claims have to come together as a package and be viewed as interdependent by those who make these claims'.[12]

Hearn's rethinking of nationalism is valuable because it moves us beyond a battle of definitions that have either an ethical surplus or an ethical deficit already priced in. By asking us to view nationalism as a practice of making claims, he offers us a constructive way forward in developing a theological ethics of nationalism. Viewed in this way, the claims made by any instantiation of nationalism may be more or less justified. They may in one instance be judged highly compatible with liberal and democratic norms, and in another be exposed as ethnocentric and fascistic.

In my 2014 study, *Honey from the Lion*, I offered a fivefold theological framework for assessing the claims of any given nationalism. First, I asserted that the doctrines of creation and redemption function as 'norming norms' which directly relativise all other identity claims. The Christian confession is of a belief in one human race, all members of which bear the imago dei as Hamish Henderson's 'bairns o' Adam' or C. S. Lewis's 'daughters of Eve'. Equal heirs to the blessings of creation, they are also equally marked by sin and equally subject to the judgement of God. God's saving work in

[35] I am reversing here the order in which he presents these ideas in the book.

Jesus Christ is available to all people regardless of ethnicity or nationality, and the one holy catholic church — in its catholicity — is constituted by God as an international nation in which the water of baptism is always thicker than the blood of kinship. Second, I drew on Reformed understandings of the stewardship of creation, and applied them to the stewardship of created diversity. Third, I followed Jacques Ellul's striking interpretation of the Genesis Babel story, reading it as an anti-fascist saga in which linguistic and cultural diversity reflect divine providence and equip people with resources to resist a violent reduction to uniformity.[36] (The providential counterpart to Babel is Pentecostal translation, [37] not Esperanto-like reduction.) Fourth, drawing on the traditional renunciations of the baptismal liturgy, I argued that Christians could only support a nationalism which made three crucial renunciations and three related affirmations. Renouncing 'the world' I took to mean renouncing imperialism (domination, invasion and colonialism) in order to peacefully practise equal regard and recognition in relation to other nations. Renouncing 'the flesh' or renouncing essentialism involved rejecting the ius sanguinis of a mythical ethnic purity in order to embrace ius soli as the basis for a 'mongrel' or rainbow nation.[38] This post-Belhar stance[39] makes room for a 'fuzzy nationalism' characterised by hybridity, along with linguistic and cultural diversity, in which there is wide scope for 'naturalisation' and for the development of hyphenated identities. Renouncing 'the devil' I read as entailing a post-Barmen nationalism, which rejects idolatrous views of the nation or 'Volk' in order to embrace a qualified understanding of national sovereignty existing under the lordship of Jesus Christ. For a fifth criterion by which to assess the claims of any given nationalism, I appealed to the classic political theology test offered by Augustine:

> If we are to discover the character of any people, we have only to examine what it loves. If it is an assembled

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[36] See Jacques Ellul, *The Meaning of the City* (Grand Rapids MI: Eerdmans, 1970).

[37] See the seminal work of Lamin Sanneh, *Translating the Message* (New York: Orbis, 1989).

[38] The Scottish novelist William McIlvanney famously celebrated the fact that 'we are a mongrel nation'.

[39] The Belhar Confession (1986) was produced from within the reformed tradition in opposition to the heresy of apartheid in South Africa: https://kerkargief.co.za/doks/bely/CF_Belhar.pdf

> multitude of rational creatures and is united by a common agreement as to what it loves, then it is not absurd to call it a 'people', no matter what the objects of its love may be. Clearly, however, the better the objects of this agreement, the better the people; and the worse the objects, the worse the people. (*City of God*, 19.24)

This text (which was read at the inauguration ceremony of President Joe Biden in 2021) is also deadly for the 'nationalism bad, patriotism good' trope, because it insists that for any pattern of allegiance, affection, identity or loyalty we interrogate the 'loves' which constitute it. I see no possible justification for exempting patriotism from this Augustinian test, which means that, just as with nationalisms, we are faced with a spectrum of possible patriotisms, of which some may be benign and healthy whereas others may be malign and toxic. Attempts to persist with this 'A/B, good/bad' distinction seem to me to be facile and theologically indefensible. This Augustinian angle clarifies that Christian theology will always want to pose questions to any politics of identity, jurisdiction and territory about the loves that lie behind it and how they relate to the call to love God and neighbour.

Hearn's 'open' definition of nationalism as a practice of claim making offers an analytical framework within which a theological consideration of nationalism can be integrated with contemporary political theory conversations about the possibility of a 'civic' or 'liberal' nationalism.[40]

The discussion so far has involved much preparing of the ground, or 'rolling the pitch', but the still ongoing visceral disagreements about definitions make this necessary. I want to emphasise again that the framework I am adopting from Hearn does not give Hazony-like privileges to nationalism in general, and still leaves us the options of determining that any given nationalism in any given era or stage of its development could be named as being illiberal, uncivil, racist, fascist, ungodly or demonic (or, more mildly, just foolish, naive and misguided/misjudged).

Shifting our focus to such a determination, Oliver O'Donovan has noted Aristotle's version of what I call 'the Goldilocks argument', in which he suggests that 'a society is "perfect" when it is not too small to

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[40] For a useful overview of this, see David Miller, 'Nationalism', in *The Oxford Handbook of Political Theory*, ed. by John S. Dryzek, Bonnie Honig and Anne Phillips (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), pp. 529–45.

rally against a threat, not too diverse to [not] be interested in doing so'. [41] This helpfully suggests that questions of when a political community should rest content with its borders, or should seek to enter or leave an incorporating union (such as the 1707 one), can be treated as a kind of 'wisdom' question. In his still valuable 1998 study, *The Sociology of Nationalism*, David McCrone quotes Daniel Bell's pithy assertion that 'the nation-state is too small for the big problems of life and too big for the small problems of life'.[42] This is the problematic that is addressed in political theory and political theology by the concept of 'subsidiarity', which received an influential formulation in the work of the seventeenth-century Calvinist thinker Johannes Althusius, and was later promoted as part of Roman Catholic social teaching via Pope Pius XI's encyclical Quadragesimo Anno (1931). It has figured prominently in discussions of the law and polity of the European Union (EU), and it is interesting in the Scottish context to consider how important the slogan 'Independence within Europe' became to the SNP from the 1980s onwards. For Scottish nationalists in the past three decades, being independent within the EU, alongside a looser intermediate 'social union' with England/RUK,[43] offered an exemplary form of subsidiarity, while also allowing them to argue simultaneously for both nationalism and internationalism.

However, the notion of subsidiarity, although important, still begs the key questions as to which functions and which elements of 'sovereignty' should be positioned at which levels. This judgement, which I have suggested we should view as a 'wisdom' judgement, involves weighing up a prospectus for the future in respect of a range of economic, social, cultural and political concerns. Donald Dewar, Scotland's (Labour) first First Minister, famously said at the reconvening of Scotland's Parliament in 1999 that 'this is about who we are and how we carry ourselves'.[44] The Union has always been

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[41] Oliver O'Donovan, *The Ways of Judgment* (Grand Rapids MI: Eerdmans, 2005), p. 156.

[42] David McCrone, *The Sociology of Nationalism: Tomorrow's Ancestors* (London: Routledge, 1998), p. 176.

[43] RUK is a term sometimes used in Scotland to refer to the rest of the UK.

[44]Video recordings of the opening of the Scottish Parliament in the General Assembly Hall of the Church of Scotland in 1999 (and of the ceremony to open the new parliament building at Holyrood in 2004) can easily be found on the Internet and replayed for the benefit of any readers who have never seen them.

strongly asymmetric and, in 2023, England is already ten times more populous than Scotland, with the gap slowly increasing. This has profound psychosocial consequences for both England and Scotland within the Union, the balance of which I believe to be strongly negative. For an incisive satirical parable illustrating this, you can do no better than James Robertson's celebrated monologue 'The News Where You Are'.[45]

It would be wearisome but not difficult to multiply examples: the asymmetrical establishment of the Church of England (an England-only denomination) in the House of Lords and its breezy domination of the public ritual of the Coronation; the daily practice of supposedly UK-wide radio and television programmes, both 'forgetting' about devolution and showing entrenched ignorance of the existence of separate legal, educational and ecclesiastical settlements in England and Scotland (as well as Wales and Northern Ireland of course); the long-term tendency within academic history and within history textbooks in schools to equate British history with English history. The list is interminable, and it is a vexing, daily, lived reality for those with ears to hear and eyes to see it.[46] I believe strongly that this psychosocial way of being British/English/Scottish is bad for both England and Scotland. It is profoundly unhealthy for any people group within a mixed community to centre their own identity in a way that shows disregard and disdain for other groups.

If there is a psychosocial deficit, there is also a democratic deficit. Scotland has not voted for a Conservative government since 1959, but by 2024 it will have been governed by the Conservatives for 37 of the 60 years since the end of that 1959 administration, on a diminishing share of the Scottish vote. Scottish public opinion was clearly opposed to the Iraq war, but to no avail. Most significantly of all, for the current political climate, 62% of the people of Scotland voted for the UK to remain in the EU in the Brexit Referendum, yet Scotland, like Northern Ireland, was taken out of the EU against the balance of the democratic will.

It was clear, in the remarkable national debate that took place in 2013–2014 in the lead-up to the Scottish Independence Referendum, that there were strong differences of opinion about the economic

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45 www.theguardian.com/media/greenslade/2014/jun/16/bbc-television

46 To note this is of course to be accused of 'having a tartan chip on your shoulder', or of being a 'whingeing Jock', etc.

benefits of the Union to Scotland. On the one hand, unionists warned about the risks to pensions, and of the prospect of an independent Scotland without UK subsidy having a massive public deficit. Those advocating for independence questioned why Scotland was deemed 'too wee, too poor or too stupid' to manage its own affairs, have its own central bank, and so on. given that comparable and even smaller countries, from Iceland to Ireland to Norway, were able to do this.

What is unarguable in 2023 is the salience of the 2016 Brexit vote. It mattered hugely in three ways. First, the Better Together campaign had explicitly used the threat of not being part of the EU as an argument for voting No. Second, Scotland voted to remain, but was forced to leave and has subsequently been exposed to the significant and growing negative consequences of Brexit. Whereas those two factors have tended to strengthen support for independence, the third factor is more problematic. I noted earlier the importance of the slogan/policy position 'Independence within Europe' for the rise of the SNP. A Yes vote in 2014 was a vote for exactly that, with relationships between Scotland and England/RUK continuing to be between two EU members. The toxic consequences of Brexit for Northern Ireland have heightened awareness of the difficulties of economic relationships where one country represents the external border of the EU. Support for independence post Brexit, if it is combined with support for re-entering the EU, now involves the prospect of some kind of 'hard' border between Scotland and England, something for which there is no demand and little appetite. Brexit has poisoned, complicated and unsettled UK politics. On the one hand, the fact that it has happened has offered the 'material change' which the SNP/Scottish Greens see as justifying their bid for a second independence referendum. On the other hand, the case for independence from an England that remains outside the EU is significantly more complex and more challenging than it was before Brexit. If Brexit has won independence supporters a justification for a new referendum, it has nonetheless been a lose-lose outcome for both unionism and nationalism. It has worked against both the legitimacy of the Union and the economic case for independence.

The affective and psychological dimensions of the Brexit vote have also changed the debate about the UK's constitutional future. The Irish journalist and critic Fintan O'Toole is one of the most articulate of the many voices that have analysed the populist 'Take Back Control' campaign as fuelled by a nostalgia for a Little Englander version of

Britishness.[47] Long hailed by political scientists as 'the dog which would not bark', English nationalism was seen to have finally emerged as a political force, albeit one that still wraps itself in the Union Jack and formally identifies itself as British patriotism.[48]

Those of us who campaigned for a Yes vote in 2014 are watching the approach of a decade since the vote, which may or may not feel like a 'generation', depending on your point of view. As someone who pastored and preached in a local congregation through the 2013–2014 campaign, I was acutely aware of those, particularly older people, within our community of faith who hated every second of it and were deeply anxious about the outcome. It threatened so much of what they knew and believed in. I was also acutely aware of those, particularly the young, for whom it propelled a wave of hope and dreams of agency to build a better future and a better country — a country in which their loves might be fulfilled.

Politics feels less hopeful since then, across the board. The inexorable advent of climate change, the unprecedented (for us at least) scenes of the pandemic, and the unbearable trauma of a pointless war of aggression, with nationalisms fuelling both attack and defence, have all taken their toll on the hopefulness of a rising generation. Our young people seem anxious, disorientated and bewildered.

Viewed from Scotland, one of the promises of independence was that we could finally vote away Trident from our shores, something no degree of 'devo max' would bring within reach. However, even that feels more uncertain, as the geopolitical calculus presses home questions about how to deter Vladimir Putin, whose crazed grifting talk-show pundits dream of deploying a tactical nuclear weapon. Post Brexit, the politics of immigration in the grind of Westminster have become more punitive and repellent. Viewed from Scotland, the departure of EU workers has left us short of labour in a country that feels far from overcrowded, where public theologian Will Storrar once urged us to think about a Scotland of 10 million people, welcoming 'a dazzling mixture' of new Scots to build a bigger and better future.

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[47]Fintan O'Toole, *Heroic Failure: Brexit and the Politics of Pain* (London: Apollo, 2019); *Three Years in Hell: The Brexit Chronicles* (London: Apollo, 2021).

[48] The crucial recent text here is Ailsa Henderson and Richard Wyn Jones, *Englishness: The Political Force Transforming Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021).

For the young, too, the sudden loss of freedom of movement has left a sour taste and raises questions about who these 'narrow nationalists' are. We inhabit a paradox of nationalist and pro-independence parties arguing for a more cosmopolitan country, while unionist forces mutter ominously about policing borders and stopping boats. The asymmetrical establishment of the Church of England offers Brexit-inclined bishops on the one hand, and their senior archbishop warning that the obscene Rwanda deportation scheme 'cannot stand the judgment of God' on the other.

Perhaps the most significant and beloved symbol of the Union, Elizabeth Windsor, died on 8 September 2022 at Balmoral, alleged by some to be the place of her own choosing for her death. Scotland was unexpectedly handed the leading role in the early stages of 'national' mourning. A solemn progress of the Queen's cortege from Royal Deeside to the Royal Mile culminated in a ritual in St Giles Cathedral, the High Kirk of Edinburgh, where protocol insisted that she could only be described as 'lying at rest', not 'lying in state'. The stateless nation hosted a stateless lying, reminding the world that statehood begins in Westminster. Nevertheless, the service at St Giles had its own simpler and more restrained dignity. The Presbyterians had their moment with a woman who was one of their own when in Scotland, while the London Anglicans waited for the real funeral to begin — the one over which they would have exclusive control. As soon as she died, it seemed obvious that no heir would ever command the affection or allegiance that she was seen to have earned and deserved. The coronation of 2023 was in large part a rerun of the one in 1953, with the Church of England in full control of the public ritual for installing a UK head of state. Maps of coronation events showed a revealing lack of take-up in Scotland, while opinion polls reflected a tide of republicanism, the speed of advance of which has surprised me. All three potential first ministers, in the SNP hustings, outed themselves as republicans in a way that would have been unimaginable before the Queen's death. It was hard to avoid the conclusion – and the coronation did little to dispel this – that a significant element of the Union, both as an idea and as a felt loyalty, died with the Queen. It remains to be seen whether Charles III and the shadow of William behind him can win back the support of the young for hereditary monarchy. I have grave doubts about this.

Ten years on, there is no way back to the political landscape of 2013. The Teflon coating has finally begun to fall away from the SNP after a period of extraordinary dominance in Scottish politics. Unionist parties scent blood in the water. SNP members have been shocked into

something like silence at their leaders' fall from grace. The unexpected contest for the SNP leadership in 2023 exposed fault lines which had been concealed in part by a 'Wheesht for indy' party discipline that had been the envy and despair of the party's political opponents, but which now seemed to have been too tightly and narrowly drawn.

The Kirk had a moment of national relevance when the Queen was lying at rest in St Giles, and at the time of writing it remains to be seen whether the presentation of the Honours of Scotland to King Charles III will mark a further one, or whether it will prove a harder ritual to hone and own. There is an opportunity to offer a liturgical, aesthetic and cultural counterpoint to the deeply English, gilded senescent bling of the London coronation, but the Kirk may not have the confidence or imagination to take it, or be allowed to do so by the combined forces of the Cabinet Office and the Palace.

When we talk of the Kirk, we are talking of an institution in deep disarray. Implementing deep cuts, and running short of ministers, members and money, it is no longer the power in the land that it once was. It has aged and declined in company with its Crathie congregant the Queen, from its peak of membership and influence around the time of her coronation, to an anxious scramble for survival and a troubled search for direction. At a guess, most of its members remain unionists, but the blunt truth is that most of Scotland never sets foot in it.

A newly secular Scotland is marking time in an anxiously liminal space. It has largely forsaken organised religion, but in the way of Jeremiah there seems to be little confidence that what newly dug cisterns exist can truly hold water (Jer. 2.13). The implosion of the SNP leadership has led to angst among its supporters and schadenfreude among its opponents, but it is far from clear where the Zeitgeist is now turning in a time of disillusionment and anxiety. The most confident voices from the Labour Party (which never stopped believing they were entitled to Scotland as their political birthright, and had briefly been usurped by the separatists) believe that their time is coming and that Gordon Brown, the 'son of the manse', can be the prophet of a born-again unionism, which is of the people and for the people.

The coming months and years will reveal how deep the desire for independence runs within Scotland. They will show how far the demise first of Alex Salmond and now of Nicola Sturgeon has dented the promise and deflated the hopes that younger Scots had placed in the brand of civic, liberal, internationalist, pro-European nationalism which they had promoted so articulately and so successfully.

In 'The Midge', the Calvinist poet allows his own theological reserve about human hubris to pose a question to the nationalist project that he holds dear:

> OK
> say you were alive and free;
> and say Gaelic was in your mouth anew.
> Would justice be done by your freedom?
> Would the truth be spoken by your language?
> Or would we be scunnered with you
> as once we were with England?[49]

It is a good question — a question which returns us to the value of understanding nationalisms as practices of claim making, and the vocation of theologies and the churches that they accompany to test and interrogate those claims. During the SNP leadership contest, Scottish Free Church theologian James Eglinton appeared as a 'witness' on BBC Radio 4's *Moral Maze* programme, which was considering 'faith in public life'. He deftly sidestepped the exclusionary hot spots that had provoked outrage during the campaign, choosing instead to dwell on a subtler and more unsettling thought about Scotland in 2023. We were, he suggested, increasingly becoming 'a low-trust society', and that was shaping the spaces in which we held our public debates and made our political decisions. There is much on which I disagree with him, but I have returned to this thought many times in the last few months. Politics, I think, becomes particularly unpredictable in low-trust, high-anxiety societies, especially when generational divides appear to be widening. I feel very uncertain whether the momentum towards independence has been decisively broken, or whether a generational turn towards an independent secular Scottish republic has already taken place and is just biding its time. Either way, my hope is that what theological and spiritual wrestling we have done with the issues raised by the referendums of 2014 and 2016 will have prepared those of us who do the work of theological reflection within our churches to make a faithful and hopeful contribution to the practice of 'the politics of love'.[50]

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[49] Fearghas MacFhionnlaigh, 'The Midge', *Cencrastus*, 10 (1982), 30.

[50] The phrase is being used and promoted in current Scottish political discourse by Stephen Noon, former chief strategist of the Yes

campaign in 2014, who subsequently spent time preparing for the Roman Catholic priesthood, but then returned to the work of political theology in Scotland, and is currently pursuing doctoral studies at New College, Edinburgh. His is an important voice to listen for in the coming years.

Scottish Separation:
A Faith in Search of an Adequate Rationale

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I have a dog in the political fight over Scottish independence. Proud to have been born in Kirkcudbrightshire, the son of a Scottish father and an English mother, educated on both sides of the border, and now living in England, I would not describe myself as either 'Scottish' or 'English'. I describe myself as 'British' because I identify myself with a certain idea of Britain — just as Scottish separatists identify themselves with a certain idea of Scotland. Consequently, in the run-up to the referendum on Scottish independence in September 2014, I lost several nights' sleep worrying about the possibility of the disintegration of Britain. Thus I certainly cannot claim to be emotionally or intellectually impartial. Nevertheless, as a Christian, I acknowledge that I have a duty to submit my visceral convictions to testing by the moral requirements of my faith.

The first thing I must admit, therefore, is that no nation is guaranteed eternal life. One of the features that distinguishes Christianity from its Jewish parent is its detachment of religious faith from blood and land. This was already evident in Jesus' distancing of himself from militant Jewish nationalism and from the Temple cult in Jerusalem, and in his recognition of genuine faith on the part of the Samaritan woman at the well, and on the part of a Roman centurion. However, it found its mature expression in St Paul's mission to the Gentiles, which involved statements such as the following famous one: 'There is no longer Jew or Greek […] for you are all one in Christ Jesus' (Gal. 3.28).

In Christian eyes, nation states come and go, and rise and fall. The UK did not exist before 1707. The USA could have ceased to exist in the early 1860s. Czechoslovakia did cease to exist in 1993. Equally, Scotland as a formally independent state ceased to exist in 1707, and whether or not it comes back into existence is written neither in the stars nor in natural law. No nation has a 'destiny' to become a fully independent state. Therefore Christian patriots should recognise that their own people and the political institutions in which they find expression are artificial constructs. They are man-made. They are not divine and eternal. They are not God.

In that respect, Christian patriotism is quite distinct from the kind of Romantic nationalism that so scarred the twentieth century, most infamously in Germany. In this kind of nationalism, the nation is a substitute for God, and it is by investing oneself wholly in the life of the nation that the individual achieves a kind of immortality. Nationalism is a quasi-religion. This view is immediately visible in the thought of the eighteenth-century German philosopher, Johann Gottlieb Fichte, who wrote:

> The noble-minded man's belief in the eternal continuance of his influence even on this earth is […] founded on the hope of the eternal continuance of the people from which he has developed […] In order to save his nation he must be ready even to die that it may live, and that he may live in it the only life for which he has ever wished.

Such an idolatrous nationalism conflates the nation with divinity. Christian patriotism cannot do that. The nation is man-made, not divine.

For that reason, Christian patriots acknowledge that their loyalty to their own country cannot be blind, and they have to be critical, holding it to account before the law of God. My Christian ideal of patriotism was incarnated, as it happens, in the life of a German. His name was Helmuth James von Moltke. A lawyer, he was the great-grand-nephew of Bismarck's famously victorious general. Although an aristocrat, he became a Christian socialist and an opponent of the Nazi Party. In the mid-1930s he came to England to qualify for the Bar there, in case he should decide to flee to that country with his family. In the end, however, he chose to return to Germany, to suffer alongside his own people, and to do what he could to mitigate the evils of the Nazi regime and prepare for a better future. In fact he did not support the July 1944 plot to kill Hitler, because he foresaw that, were it to succeed, the plot would have given Germany a conservative regime that, although not Nazi, was not different enough. He believed that, in order to be redeemed, Germany had to suffer an unequivocal, catastrophic defeat before being reconstructed from the bottom up. Imagine how painful that wish must have been for a patriot. Such a view is only possible because Christian patriotism is not Romantic nationalism. The Christian patriot must be willing to play prophet to their own country, criticising it because they love it and want to save its soul. They must also be willing to accept that national salvation sometimes requires radical restructuring.

So I, as a Christian British patriot, must be willing to entertain the possibility that the UK has come to the end of its natural life, and that it is time to dismantle it and build something new. This is not a conclusion that I would welcome, but I have to acknowledge that it might be the right one. By the same token, of course, the Christian Scottish separatist must be willing to entertain the possibility that their idea of an independent Scotland, their correlative idea of the UK, and their conception of the problem and its solution are all mistaken. Patriotic feelings, however visceral and deeply felt, are always based on perceptions, and perceptions may err. They may even be sinful. After all, a Christian will believe that patriots — whether British or Scottish — are both creatures, limited in knowledge and understanding, and sinners, prone to love either the wrong things altogether or the right things wrongly.

Before I proceed any further, let me pause to explain why I talk about Scottish 'separatists' rather than 'nationalists'. I am aware that the latter often resent being described as the former, and I do not want irritation to distract from the rest of what I have to say.

'Independence' can mean all manner of things, which is why those garnering support for the separation of Scotland from the UK prefer the question in the ballot box to be 'Do you want Scotland to be independent?' rather than 'Do you want Scotland to leave the UK?'. The indefinite word 'independence' attracts more votes than the more definite term 'separation'. Independence always comes in degrees; it is always relative, never absolute. No nation on earth — not even the USA — is absolutely independent of other nations. Post-Brexit Britain is more independent of the European Union (EU) than it used to be, but it still needs various kinds of exchange and cooperation in order to flourish.

Within the UK, Scotland has always been relatively independent, retaining its own Kirk, law and education systems. In the nineteenth century and up until the later decades of the twentieth century, most Scottish nationalists wanted greater self-determination or at least recognition within the UK. And with the establishment of the Scottish Parliament in 1999 that is what they have acquired, with the people of Scotland now enjoying a high degree of legislative, policy and executive independence, together with representation in both Edinburgh and London.

What is different about present-day Scottish nationalists is that they typically want more than this, and not just more of the same. They want the specific kind of independence that comes from leaving the

Anglo-Scottish Union, just as the UK left the EU in 2016. In that constitutional sense, they want separation. This is why I refer to Scottish 'separatism' and 'separatists' — not to be irritating or provocative, but merely to be quite clear about what kind of nationalism and independence I am referring to.

As a Christian, I am bound to acknowledge that there could be a cogent case for Scotland's separation from the UK. So what might that be?

The strongest separatist argument is that the people of Scotland prefer a left-of-centre, social democratic polity with a more interventionist state and a more generous welfare state, whereas — judging by its propensity to elect Conservative governments — the English electorate's centre of gravity is markedly further to the right and more in favour of a smaller state and a freer market. As a consequence, the legitimate aspiration of the people of Scotland for a fairer, more equal society has been consistently stymied by a neoliberal Westminster.

If this were true, it would certainly be a reason for greater Scottish autonomy and a further devolution of powers from Westminster to Edinburgh, although not necessarily for outright secession from the UK. As it happens, however, the narrative of separatist politicians does not tally with the hard evidence from the social scientific data, which suggests that, overall, the people of Scotland stand only slightly to the left of the English. According to the hard social scientific data of the 2010 British Social Attitudes (BSA) survey, Scotland is only 'somewhat more social democratic than England' and 'appears to have experienced something of a drift away from a social democratic outlook during the course of the past decade, in tandem with public opinion in England'.[51] Even the late Stephen Maxwell, nationalist intellectual and founder of the modern Scottish National Party (SNP), agreed with this, writing shortly before his death in 2012 that there is 'nothing in Scotland's recent political record to suggest a pent-up demand for radical social and economic change waiting to be released by independence'.[52]

Seven years later, the picture of Scotland leaning only slightly more to the left on some issues remained the same. On the one hand,

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[51] *British Social Attitudes Survey 28* (London: SAGE Publications Ltd, 2012), pp. 33–4.

[52] Stephen Maxwell, *Arguing for Independence* (Edinburgh: Luath Press, 2012), p. 10.

according to the 2019 BSA survey, 73% of people in Scotland believe that the distribution of incomes in Britain is unfair, compared with 65% in England.[53] On the other hand, according to an analysis of 2017 data by John Curtice and Ian Montagu, attitudes towards immigration in Scotland and in England and Wales are almost identical. Among the people of Scotland, more believe that immigration is good for the British economy (46%) than believe it is bad for it (17%), and more think that immigration enriches British culture (43%) than think it undermines it (20%). The corresponding figures for England and Wales are virtually the same, at 47% compared with 16%, and 43% compared with 23%, respectively.[54]

A more recent argument in favour of separation is that in the 2016 referendum on Brexit the people of Scotland wanted to remain in the EU, but were dragged out of it by the predominant English electorate. That is only very roughly true, and needs careful qualification. Although a solid majority (62%) of people in Scotland voted to remain, a substantial minority (38%) voted to leave, only seven points short of the minority that voted for Scottish 'independence' in 2014. And although a majority (53%) of English voters opted to leave the EU, a very substantial minority (47%) chose to remain. Therefore although the proportions of remain voters to leave voters in the two populations were indeed different, that difference was by no means a simple, binary one of 'Scottish Remainers' versus 'English Leavers'.
Furthermore, people in Scotland who voted to remain might be inclined to share the common view of Remainers that the Leave vote was fuelled by imperial nostalgia, xenophobia and racism. And they might suppose that this marks an important difference between the peoples north and south of the border. There are, however, no good grounds for believing any of this. There is no empirical evidence that English voters who favoured leaving the EU did so because they dreamed of reviving Britain's imperial role of a century ago. And although there is evidence that concern about the UK's inability to

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[53] *British Social Attitudes 38* (London: SAGE Publications Ltd, 2020): www.bsa.natcen.ac.uk/latest-report/british-social-attitudes-38/social-inequality.aspx

[54] John Curtice and Ian Montagu, *Do Scotland and England & Wales Have Different Views about Immigration?*' (Edinburgh: Scottish Centre for Social Research, 2018): https://whatscotlandthinks.org/analysis/do-scotland-and-england-wales-have-different-views-about-immigration/

control immigration within the single market was a motive, that does not amount to xenophobia. Even the eminent, left-of-centre development economist Paul Collier has argued in favour of controlling immigration, for the sake both of maintaining social cohesion within the receiving country and of retaining talent within the sending one.[55] As for racism, the Conservative government that presided over 'getting Brexit done' was unprecedented in giving charge of almost all the major departments of state to secretaries of state with non-pink skins.

In addition to this, it cannot be presumed that all those who voted to remain in the EU in 2016 would vote to rejoin it now, as the conditions of membership have changed markedly. In the case of an independent Scottish state, the only option would be to join for the first time, not to *re*-join on the old terms. Scottish membership would not attract any of the special privileges that the UK had carved out for itself and used to enjoy. It would also require the adoption of the euro as its currency, and with that a commitment to ever closer political union. And closer political union would necessarily involve a loss of sovereignty — of independence — in the setting of domestic and foreign policies. In addition, Scottish membership of the EU could well create a hard border with its nearest and biggest market in the rest of the UK.

Thus the fact that it was unwise for the UK to leave the EU in 2016 — if it *was* unwise — does not make it wise for Scotland to rejoin the EU after separating from the UK.

Back in 2014 it was argued that membership of the UK inhibited Scotland's economic growth, and that an independent Scotland's standard of living would be higher. These claims depended for their truth upon a number of variable and — in the crucial matter of the price of oil — volatile factors. The claims were also highly speculative and fiercely contested.

One crucial economic issue in the referendum debate was that of currency. Alex Salmond plucked the heartstrings of nationalist sentiment by defiantly asserting what no one actually denied — the right of the people of Scotland to exercise their sovereign will in choosing to keep the pound. What he passed over was the equal but awkward truth that their sovereign will had neither the right nor the power to dictate how the rest of the UK (RUK) would respond.

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[55] Paul Collier, *Exodus: How Migration is Changing our World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

Salmond argued that it would be in everyone's interests to enter into a formal currency union. Whether it was true or not, such a proposal attracted two problems. First, it would inevitably involve Scotland agreeing to compromise its independence by suffering constraints on its tax and spending policies. Second, the leaders of the UK's main political parties, backed up by the Canadian Governor of the Bank of England, had all said that it would not be in the RUK's interests to enter into a formal currency union with an independent Scotland, and that they would not agree to it.

Without a formal currency union, the Bank of England would set interest rates to suit the economy of the RUK, not that of Scotland. Sooner or later the situation would arise in which Scotland would need higher rates, say, to calm a property boom, but the RUK would need lower rates, say, to stimulate a sluggish economy. In that case, the Bank of England would look to the needs of the RUK, not those of Scotland. This is exactly what happened in the Republic of Ireland in the run-up to the financial crisis of 2007. The value of property there was rocketing unsustainably because the European Central Bank, with its eye fixed mainly on Germany, kept interest rates low at 2%. The result was that the Irish property bubble burst, with values tumbling by up to an alarming 50%.

As long as it remains part of the UK, Scotland has a seat at the table of the Bank of England's deliberations, in which its needs will continue to figure. However, were it to leave, this would no longer be the case. Thus an independent Scotland could keep the pound unilaterally, but only at the price of losing all control over its own interest rates. Hence the incoherence at the heart of the 'Yes' campaign's position in 2014 — that its kind of 'independence' would actually have amounted to *less* national self-determination.

That was over 8 years ago, of course. Yet the SNP's policy today is that an independent Scotland would continue to use sterling until — at an indeterminate date in the future — it either launched its own currency prior to joining the euro or joined the euro straightaway. However, adopting the euro would most likely raise a hard trade barrier with its nearest market in the RUK, to which it currently exports three times as much as it does to the EU. (It would also, of course, commit Scotland to a process of ever closer political integration within the eurozone, which would involve a loss of independence in setting policies of taxation and spending.)

To the volatility of the price of oil, the loss of control either over fiscal policy or over interest rates, and the increased cost of trading with her largest partner, we must add the structural deficit of around

10% of GDP with which an independent Scotland would begin life. Since — as the Trussonomics debacle has recently reminded us — the financial markets are merciless in punishing fiscal irresponsibility, the first government of a separate Scottish state would have to embark on a policy of brutal austerity.

Maybe all of this economic pain would be short term, and perhaps it would be followed by unprecedented prosperity. However, I can see no good reason to be confident that this would be the case. Economically, Scottish separation from the UK would be a gamble, just like Brexit. There is no doubt that Scotland would survive. However, there is also plenty of reason to doubt that the people of Scotland would become more prosperous, more powerful and therefore more 'independent'.

There could be good reasons for Scotland's separation from the UK. It could be that a strong majority of people in Scotland have for some considerable time consistently wanted a markedly more social democratic political environment than they can obtain within the UK, that such a majority now wants entry into the EU on the terms currently available, and that Scotland would clearly be more economically prosperous outside the UK than within it. None of those things, it seems to me, are true.

Moreover, some arguments in favour of separation trade on what I regard as a seriously distorted, pejorative reading of Britain's history. Thus some separatists make an argument whose gist is that 'Britain equals empire equals evil'. Seen in this light, therefore, breaking away from the Anglo-Scottish union and breaking up the UK would be a double act of national self-purification — for Scotland and for the RUK.

Imperial or colonial history has always been contested, of course, but in the wake of the killing of George Floyd in the USA in 2021, and the consequent spread of the Black Lives Matter movement across the Atlantic, it is now especially and publicly controversial. In my recent book, *Colonialism: A Moral Reckoning*, I have laid out my own view.[56] In summary, like any longstanding state, whether national or imperial, the British Empire caused lamentable evils, but it also caused admirable goods. For example, it presided over 150 years of slave trading and slavery, but it was also among the first states in the

[56] Nigel Biggar, *Colonialism: A Moral Reckoning* (London: William Collins, 2023).

history of the world to abolish both, and it went on to become the international leader in suppressing them worldwide.

However, we can go further than the banal point that the Empire caused both bad and good things to happen. We can also say that attempts to argue that it was evil at its heart, by likening it to Nazism and accusing it of 'genocide', fail. On British imperial territory there was never any intentional, government-sponsored attempt to annihilate a native people, not even in Tasmania. On the contrary, there were widespread efforts by colonial governments to enable native peoples to survive the impact of European modernity, adapt to it and prosper in it. I conclude that we cannot say that the British Empire was essentially racist or essentially exploitative or essentially given to disproportionate violence. Otherwise, millions of Chinese people would not have chosen to flee mainland China to find refuge in the non-democratic British colony of Hong Kong in the 1950s and 1960s.

In addition, we can say that the Empire learned from its mistakes, so that, tutored by the loss of the American colonies in the 1780s, it put Canada, Australia, South Africa and New Zealand on the road to independence from the 1860s onward, and had India join them at the end of the First World War. And the fact that the British Empire exhausted itself fighting the massively murderous and centrally racist Nazi regime during the Second World War — during which, from May 1940 to June 1941, it offered the only military opposition (together with Greece) — speaks well of its predominant values.

Therefore we cannot fairly equate the British Empire with evil. Indeed we can say that the Empire led to humanitarian and liberal endeavours and achievements that anyone today who thinks of him- or herself as 'progressive' should admire and seek to emulate.

So far my argument has been negative, pointing out the respects in which the case for separation does not add up. Now I want to move from my back foot on to my front one and explain what I think the UK is good for. The first benefit is the stronger security of political liberty. In 2015 we celebrated the 800th anniversary of the Magna Carta, when the English Church and barons compelled King John to accept certain limitations on royal power. Partly as a consequence of this, foreign observers in the late medieval period — not least in France — remarked on the extraordinary extent to which English monarchs were held accountable by parliament. And one reason why some Scots in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries hoped for unification with England was that English law might come to constrain the arbitrary

feudal powers of the Scottish nobility.[57] After the Union of England and Scotland in 1707, the Scots together with the English, Welsh and Irish — that is, the British — pursued a political path that led to increasing constraints upon royal power and increasingly accountable government. This path was not universal — many other countries did not follow it, and in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries Britain's constitutional and increasingly democratic model was widely admired by liberals throughout Europe. However, after the end of the Second World War in 1945 with the defeat of Nazism in Germany, and especially after the end of the Cold War in 1989 with the collapse of the Soviet Union, liberal democracy became more widespread, not least in Europe. Consequently, the political model that the British had pioneered came to appear less exceptional and more normal. As a Foreign Office official once put it to me, we British had become the victims of our own success.

Sometimes, however, appearances can be deceiving, and they are so here. Recent developments in the world should remind us that the liberal democratic political system that the British have played a leading part in developing is really not so normal. It is not a piece of the cosmic furniture. It is not the natural, default position of human political life. It is contingent, vulnerable and precious. It is an important historical achievement, which cost our forebears much sweat and some blood to build and defend, and which we really could lose. In the light of Russia's recent veering in an autocratic and aggressively nationalist direction, in the light of the rise of an increasingly belligerent China ruled by a Communist Party that is neither liberal nor democratic, and in the light of the atrociously inhumane politics of Islamic State in Syria and Iraq and of other jihadist movements in Nigeria and Sudan, it should now be clearer to us that the political liberty, accountability and humanity that we have achieved in Britain should not be taken for granted. They may not be unique in the world, but nor are they universal or secure.

Of course, if Scotland or Wales were to secede from the Union, or if Northern Ireland was to be absorbed into its southern neighbour, they would most probably continue to maintain the liberal democratic political institutions and customs that the British had developed together. Nevertheless, there is no doubt that a United Kingdom would be stronger in terms of both soft and hard power, and thus better able

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[7] Colin Kidd, *Union and Unionisms: Political Thought in Scotland, 1500-2000* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), pp. 8, 145–8.

to secure liberal democracy at home and promote it abroad, than would a set of small, vulnerable, independent nations and a diminished English rump. As Mark Lyall Grant has recently written:

> As British ambassador to the UN, I watched with some anxiety from New York the final days of the Scottish referendum campaign in September 2014. My Russian opposite number […] sympathised with barely suppressed glee at the prospect of the UK dismembered and its permanent seat on the UN Security Council called into question. It was clear to me that Scottish independence would have had a devastating impact on the UK's standing in the world, much greater than withdrawal from the EU ever could.[58]

Stronger external security for liberal democracy is one benefit that the UK provides. The second benefit is peace, trust and solidarity among the four nations in the British Isles. We often forget, especially those of us who are English, that the UK is a multinational state, comprising a union of English, Welsh, Scottish and Irish peoples. Each of those peoples has maintained its own national customs and has either retained or acquired its own institutions. Within the UK, the people of Scotland — as I have already said — have always preserved their own law, established Church and education system, and their culture now thrives. Welsh language flourishes far more strongly in Wales than does Irish language in the independent Republic across the water, and Northern Ireland has enjoyed its own legislative assembly for much longer than either Wales or Scotland. So flexibly successful has our Union been that the thought of violent conflict erupting (again) between its constituent peoples is almost unimaginable.

Contrary to Alex Salmond's easy reassurances in 2014 that the extraordinary 'social union' between England and Scotland would happily survive Scottish 'independence', I think that a Scottish vote to secede would probably kindle a degree of mutual hostility that these

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[58] Mark Lyall Grant, 'Keep the rest of the world in view while negotiating Brexit', *Financial Times*, 15 September 2017: www.ft.com/content/64aab762-9896-11e7-8c5c-c8d8fa6961bb. For some informed speculation about how Scottish independence would weaken the power of both Scotland and the rest of the UK to defend their borders against Russian intrusion and criminal trafficking in drugs and people, see Paul Cornish and Kingsley Donaldson, 'A Disunited Kingdom: UK Domestic Security', in *2020: World of War* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2017), pp. 00–00.

islands have not witnessed since the eighteenth century.[59] The negotiation of separation would be tough and fraught. The separating people of Scotland would certainly not get all that they want, they would be frustrated, and traditional resentment of England would only deepen. For their part the English, having woken up to the costs and risks of the dissolution of the UK, including the permanent weakening of Britain's international prestige and power, would discover a general resentment of the people of Scotland that they have never before had reason to feel. Anyone who thinks that this speculation is unduly pessimistic only needs to reflect on the fallout from the Brexit vote in 2016, with its profound resentments and prolonged recriminations. Britain was partly integrated into the EU for a mere 43 years, whereas England and Scotland have been united for more than three centuries.

Maybe the mutual alienation caused by the dissolution of the Union would last for only two or three generations, as in the case of Ireland. Perhaps, unlike the situation in Ireland, no blood would be shed. Perhaps, however, this would not be the case. One of the nobler intentions of the Union was precisely to end recurrent warfare between Scotland and England, and it has been one of its finest achievements to make bloody conflict so unimaginable as to appear impossible. However, appearances can be deceiving here, too: imagination is no constraint upon possibility. Anglo-Scottish peace — like European peace — is a fragile historical achievement, not a cosmic fixture. And as we know from the bloody disintegration of Yugoslavia in the 1990s, and, closer to home, from the 30-year-long 'Troubles' in Northern Ireland, history can sometimes roll shockingly backwards.

Peace, however, can be more than just the absence of violence; it can also be widespread trust and solidarity, and in Britain it has been. In this respect the UK already is what the EU can still only dream of becoming. In general, taxpayers in wealthy London no more complain when their taxes are transferred to poorer people in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland than when they are transferred elsewhere in England. That is because, in general, they identify with the Welsh, Scottish and Northern Irish as their own people — as fellow Britons. Compare that with the appalled reaction of most Germans to the prospect of having to bail out the crippled economies of Greece or Italy

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[59] As the Scottish political scientist Michael Keating has argued in a Catalan current affairs magazine, downplaying the risks of independence is typical of separatist movements throughout Europe. See 'La cuestión de las nacionalidades', *Vanguardia*, March 2013, p. 37.

in the wake of the financial crisis of 2008, and their adamant refusal to countenance the eurozone becoming a transfer union. The contrast brings to the surface the extraordinary depth of habitual solidarity among a plurality of nations that we have achieved here in the UK.

These are the terms in which Gordon Brown explained his vision for the future of the UK in his book, *My Scotland, Our Britain: A Future Worth Sharing*, published in 2014.[60] The rationale for the Union, according to Brown, is to be found in the common advantages that all Britons enjoy as a result of an integrated economy, the pooling of risks, and the transfer of resources from richer to poorer across the whole territory of the UK. This is why it is vital that the Westminster government continues to insist upon retaining control over such things as national insurance and the state pension, and refusing nationalist demands for full fiscal autonomy. It is vital for the common well-being of all the British peoples.

Stronger external security for liberal democracy and multinational solidarity are two benefits of the Union. A third benefit is the habit of taking responsibility for upholding a liberal and humane global order, if necessary by deploying hard power. This, of course, is the legacy of empire and manifests itself in Britain's retention of a place among the permanent members of the UN Security Council.

Many Scottish separatists (along with left-wing idealists) despise this situation, seeing Scotland's separation, dissolving the UK and adopting a more 'Nordic' role in international affairs, as an act of repentance for Britain's immoral tradition of imperial aggression and domination. They regard the British policy elite's hankering after the imperial power and role of global policeman, albeit now with the reduced status of deputy to the USA's sheriff, as at the same time delusory, pathetic and immoral. It is delusory because Britain no longer has the power to rule the world as she once did, it is pathetic because it makes the British play poodle to America, and it is immoral because it involves threatening and dominating other peoples, often by waging war against them, sometimes in violation of international law. Instead, the Scottish separatists argue, the UK should shake off its post-imperial hangover, follow Europe rather than America, surrender its nuclear weapons, concentrate on wielding soft power, and limit its military activity to UN peacekeeping operations. And if the

[60] Gordon Brown, *My Scotland, Our Britain: A Future Worth Sharing* (London: Simon & Schuster, 2014).

UK will not choose to do that, then Scotland will force her to do so — by breaking up the Union.

The reasons for refusing that option are several. First, as I have argued earlier in this article, the history of the British Empire was not one of relentless aggression and oppression. It was also one of liberation, involving endeavours and achievements that any contemporary 'progressive' should admire.

Second, it simply is not true that post-war Britain has always meekly trotted along behind the USA. Harold Wilson refused to send British troops to Vietnam, Margaret Thatcher arm-twisted Ronald Reagan into supporting the ejection of the Argentine forces from the Falkland Islands in 1982, and Tony Blair publicly embarrassed a very reluctant (and resentful) Bill Clinton into deploying US military forces in Kosovo and Serbia in 1999.

Third, if the UK is expected to give up the use of hard power, is that because no one should use it at all or because someone else should use it instead and more effectively? It is my view that, unless we buy into an impossibly sunny view of human beings and ignore the obvious lessons of history, we have to acknowledge that intractably malevolent leaders can sometimes move nation states (like empires) to do atrocious things. And unless we are pacifists, we also have to acknowledge that sometimes atrocious things can only be stopped by armed force. Perhaps we think that the UN should do the policing, but the UN only has as many regiments as nation states choose to loan it. No doubt a thoroughly post-imperial, 'Nordic' Britain would lend its troops for peacekeeping purposes, but who then would fight the wars to *make* the just peace to be kept?

Maybe what separatists want is not so much the UK's abandonment of hard power as its strict submission to the collective will of the UN Security Council. If so, they would be content for the enforcement capacity of the UN to be at the mercy of the threat of veto by Putin's Russia and the Communist Party's China, neither of whose records of humanitarian concern are exactly glowing. They would also join Alex Salmond in condemning NATO's 1999 military intervention to end ethnic cleansing in Kosovo as a 'misguided' policy of 'dubious legality and unpardonable folly'.[61] Embarrassingly, however, this would align them against the then UN Secretary-General, Kofi Annan. It would also set them at odds with the majority of international lawyers. Commenting on the Kosovo intervention, the eminent Finnish historian and philosopher of international law, Martti Koskenniemi,

[61] *The Scotsman*, 30 March 1999.

has written that 'most lawyers—including myself—have taken the ambivalent position that it was both formally illegal and morally necessary'.[62]

The truth is that, in the sinful world that we inhabit, the upholding of international order and the rescuing of the innocent from mass atrocities do sometimes require the naked use of armed force. This is a lamentable and tragic fact, but it is a fact nonetheless. Hard power, then, is morally necessary and we need some liberal democratic states to be ready to exercise it. However, very few European ones are willing and able to do so — two generations after the end of the Second World War, most of them still prefer to free-ride on US power. Understandably, the Americans are getting increasingly fed up with that situation. For Britain to take the separatists' preferred 'Nordic' option, then, would be a major desertion of international duty and leadership, and it could well be the straw that finally broke the USA's already wavering faith in Europe.

If the demand that Scotland should separate itself from the UK was a proportionate response to a political or economic problem, if it did not flatter itself in the light of a distorted reading of Britain's imperial record, if it did not underestimate the risks and costs of separation, if it had the courage to grasp the nettle of the necessity of the use of hard power, and if it took into account the damaging impact of the break-up of the UK upon the Western alliance at a time when liberal democracy is under military threat in Ukraine and Taiwan, then, I admit, it would be justified. However, it is and does none of these things. It seems to me to be a dogmatic faith in desperate search of a justifying rationale.

Certainly the people of Scotland have every right to aspire to a better, more just world — one in which the vulnerable are defended and relief is provided for those affected by poverty. Indeed, Christians would surely say that they have a duty to ensure this. However, although they are obliged to be hopeful, Christians should be restrained from utopianism. They should know that the creaturely powers of human beings to predict and control the future are very limited, that acts often have unforeseen effects, and that the best intentions can have the worst consequences. They should also know that abusive and oppressive sin is universal, cannot always be

[62] Martti Koskenniemi, '"The Lady Doth Protest Too Much": Kosovo and the Turn to Ethics in International Law', *The Modern Law Review*, 65 (2008), 163.

dissuaded by sweet reason, and may require the tragic exercise of force if it is to be stopped.

Yet, still obliged to pray for the coming of God's Kingdom, to hope for what they pray for and to act in accordance with their prayers, Christians should put their shoulders to the stubborn wheel of analysing social problems — for example, Scotland's drug epidemic and diminished educational record — with a view to crafting suitable, practicable solutions that look set to cause a change for the better over time. And they should not be distracted from this hard graft by the siren call of revolutionary promises of suddenly 'transformative' clean breaks.

REVIEWS

Jonathan Bernier, *Rethinking the Dates of the New Testament: The Evidence for Early Composition* (Grand Rapids MI: Baker Academic, 2022). xviii, 318 pp. Paperback ISBN 978-1-5409-6180-8.

This book aspires to be a 'spiritual successor' to John Robinson's *Redating the New Testament* (p. 239). It claims that no other book written in the past century has sought to defend a generally 'lower' (i.e., earlier) set of dates for the entire New Testament corpus — and that this amounts to two more than have defended 'middle' and 'higher' (i.e., later) dates. Although the various introductions to the New Testament which treat each book were not necessarily written with an agenda to defend particular dates, their omission from consideration raises two questions.

Given the plethora of scholarship treating the origins of one or more early Christian writings, one might ask whether it is still possible to produce a comprehensive work that is not either weighed down by annotations and references, or that ignores significant contributions to the study of particular texts and traditions. This book is self-consciously minimalist in its acknowledgement of previous scholarship, which might not be problematic, were it not for comments made in the Introduction.

The author claims to have avoided citing the work of known members of the German Nazi party, unless their distinctive contribution to scholarship made this necessary. He is not the first to grapple with this particular issue, and, as it happens, few German or other scholars of that period are cited. Although this position can claim some moral high ground, it is problematic for several reasons. German Nazis did not have a monopoly on racism, fascism and anti-Semitism, all of which were attested long before that party was formed, and have persisted in many parts of the world long after it had been defeated; supporters of apartheid in South Africa and of segregation in the USA come immediately to mind, not to mention those who would see the Royal Navy sink vessels carrying asylum seekers across the English Channel. Although scholarship is undoubtedly influenced by the context in which authors work, and by the values that they espouse, critical awareness of this issue is required at all times; it is neither academically sound nor morally adequate to single out one particular example whose military defeat has left it an easy target. Furthermore, records are far from complete and accessible, and it is unlikely that the lingering questions that surround some German scholars of the relevant period will ever be resolved; those whose survival has not depended upon the compromises of life under totalitarian regimes

should perhaps be cautious when making assumptions about people who had to negotiate the existential and moral challenges involved.

The same principle is applied to the work of scholars who have been 'credibly accused of' sexual offences. In two cases the convictions of scholars cited are noted, but in neither of these is there any reference to official records of judicial proceedings. The fact that one of these individuals was an Episcopal priest (with a particularly unfortunate name) indicates that this problem is not confined to academia. Whether or not personality disorders, including a propensity to sexually exploit more vulnerable people, have an impact on scholarly judgement, there remain questions that need to be addressed about such explicit moral grandstanding. Rumours have circulated about other scholars, including at least some whose work arguably ought to have been cited in this book. Few are in a position to ascertain the credibility of allegations and innuendo, still less to establish the truth in the absence of any public notice of the outcome of judicial or disciplinary proceedings. Are readers to assume that any scholar of stature whose work might be considered relevant to the subject of this book, but which has not been cited, has been 'credibly accused of' sexual misconduct? What does the author consider to be the threshold of credibility in such cases? What about scholars who have perpetrated other crimes or moral failures? Although the gravity of some of the offences cited should not be downplayed, at what point does extrajudicial 'disappearing' or *damnatio memoriae* become appropriate, particularly in a work that might be considered sparse in its references and bibliography?

Turning to the substance of the book, the work is divided into four parts that treat the New Testament documents according to a categorisation that is undoubtedly practical and has become almost traditional; a fifth part considers selected extracanonical documents.

The synoptic gospels are discussed without any serious attempt to address the questions surrounding any earlier written and oral material that they may incorporate, and the implications that this may have for their dating. Legitimate questions are raised about the influence of the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple by the Romans on the development of eschatological traditions in particular. However, the possible influence of events surrounding the orders of the Roman emperor Gaius Caligula to have his statue erected in the temple (around 40 AD) is not even mentioned, despite its potential usefulness for arguing an earlier date for at least some synoptic traditions.

The Pauline letters are similarly treated without sufficient attention to the composition theories concerning 2 Corinthians in particular. Although questions of pseudepigraphy are acknowledged, no serious attempt is made to resolve these. Acts is used for dating the activities of Paul, including letter

writing, in ways that most contemporary scholars would not find credible. This also has an impact on the discussion of the general letters, not least in assuming that Acts 2 provides evidence of a Christian presence at a very early date in the provinces listed.

Bernier is quite frank about the levels of uncertainty with which he is working, sometimes identifying earliest and latest plausible dates more than half a century apart. For some readers this will prove frustratingly vague and non-committal, whereas others will consider it to be an honest reflection of the uncertainty inherent in the exercise. Few are likely to find equivocation compelling. Therefore, however tenuous the assumptions upon which consensus has been based, a proverbial house of cards petrified with the cumulative encrustation of incisive argument and assent may prove more durable than one freshly constructed without benefit of such reinforcement. Nevertheless, this is a significant challenge to assumptions that have been all too easily made, and will require that in future more serious attention is given not only to dating the early Christian documents, but also to the methods and criteria that are used in such reconstructions.

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Ian Bradley, *Breathers of an Ampler Day: Victorian Views of Heaven*. Durham: Sacristy Press, 2023. ISBN 978-1-78959-306-8. Pp. Vii, 195. Pbk. £14.95.

This is a lovely book on a number of different levels. Despite the slightly inaccessible title (you have to know your Tennyson pretty well to catch it), it is a fine journey into the Victorian mindset by a scholar who knows and loves his material, expressive,as Ian Bradley puts in in his Preface, of his own faith and enthusiasms. As someone who shares many of those enthusiasms for the Victorian age, I read this book on death, the afterlife and visions of heaven, as essentially a pastoral reminder of how much we have lost in our own over-medicalised age when it comes to addressing the inevitable matter of death.

We need to be reminded how close death was to most Victorians as we in our own time do our level best to avoid its reality. In the nineteenth century people lived with an appalling rate of infant mortality, the frequent deaths of women in childbirth, premature death through poverty, lack of proper nourishment or overwork, and simply a lack of proper medical care. It is easy to dismiss a great deal of Victorian hymnology and poetry as sentimental and indulgent, but one needs to remember always the ever present shadow of death and bereavement. Indeed, as Bradley, with learning always present and lightly worn, emphasizes the pastoral and poetic necessity of the vision of heaven as an assurance of peace and comfort and an affirmation of family ties that endure through the separation of death. Ian Bradley leads his reader through a company of poets, authors, hymn writer, theologians and 'honest doubters' to bring them together, in faith and in doubt, in the necessary comfort of visions of heaven. His own adherence to the theology of F. D.Maurice is touching and unfashionable, but perhaps the heart of his discussion lies in Tennyson and that great work beloved of Queen Victoria herself, *In Memoriam*. It should still be read for even today it remains a work of stretched faith expressed in eulogy and lament for the poet's friend Arthur Hallam, and it is a reminder that theology only goes so far in its capacity to assure as in the Victorian period the sense of immortality was more powerful than the theology of the resurrection, and heaven was envisioned in largely anthropological rather than theological terms. It is easy to dismiss the sentimentality of the verses of an Adelaide Procter or even Christina Rossetti, but their poetry spoke profoundly to a people who were in need of comfort and assurance and a church that was encountering death on a daily basis.

Bradley introduces his reader to a company of writers, theologians and clergy some of whom will be unfamiliar to many of them. It was moving to read of George Matheson, the blind Church of Scotland minister who believed in immortality already encountered in this life and not just after death. Rich, too, is the chapter on Charles Kingsley, Frederick Robertson (of Brighton) and Walt Whitman, who celebrate the on-going life that follows our own bodily decay in processes of biological renewal as our earthly remains becomes the loam of new life. There is no doubt that for many Victorians as they faced death all around them the movings of the heart overwhelmed the promptings of the mind in visions of angelic rest and the relative neglect of visions of hell. Is there, perhaps, not hell enough on earth for so many?

And so the Conclusion takes us to our own experience today in which death is so often regarded as medical defeat, and gone through for many in the isolation of a hospital bed, regarded as a great taboo hardly to be spoken of. The Victorians were not always theologically precise - but they often

offered in hymn and verse a vision that spoke of comfort as Dean Tait and his wife watched helplessly as five daughters, one after another, succumbed to scarlet fever in the space of one month in March 1856. Who would not begrudge them - and us - the comfort of the ocean depths of God's love, however that is understood, returned to by Bradley through the verse of George Matheson as he closes this moving, learned and rather beautiful book. If modern theology has rather neglected heaven, as Bradley suggests in his Conclusion, is that not, perhaps, to our great loss. And we still sing so many of the hymns of the Victorians and the hope they offer. A realized eschatology based in this life is all very well - but death still comes to us all as an end of all that we know and love, as Covid has so recently reminded us. I am so grateful for this book which deserves a wide readership.

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Christopher Landau, *A Theology of Disagreement: New Testament Ethics for Ecclesial Conflicts* (London: SCM, 2021). xxvi, 214 pp. Paperback ISBN 978-0-334-06045-1.

Christopher Landau is a former BBC journalist whose brief included religious affairs. His skilled observations of ecclesiastical infighting and power politics have undoubtedly been developed through experience, but he brings to the theological task a commitment to finding ways in which such conflict can be managed without damage to the mission and public image of the Church. He is now Director of ReSource, an organisation that aims 'to see churches across the UK Alive in the Spirit and Active in Mission', according to its website (www.resource-arm.net/features/2/history-vision-and-values). This book is based on an Oxford DPhil thesis, which was supervised by Nigel Biggar while the author was curate at St Aldates Church and attached to the Oxford Pastorate.

It has to be said that this book is stronger on ethics than it is on the New Testament. The opening chapter is particularly disappointing, showing little awareness of the critical issues surrounding many of the passages discussed, and all but dismissing the relevance of questions that scholars are wont to explore. Arguably it may not matter whether a particular saying was spoken by the historical Jesus, and in what particular context, or which sayings and incidents have been recounted in different ways before a particular version has been committed to writing in one or other of the synoptic Gospels. On the other hand, perhaps it does matter whether what

is presented as a concise and even abstract saying in the Gospel text, or appears so to today's reader, was addressed to particular people who were living in a social and economic situation over which they had no control, and who were seeking to respond to its challenges, soliciting guidance in interpreting and applying the resources of their spiritual and cultural heritage in a time of crisis. What is true of the first chapter is also true of the following chapters on the Johannine tradition, Paul, and the remaining New Testament documents — from which Revelation is conspicuously omitted. For a book that takes as its point of departure Richard Hays' *The Moral Vision of the New Testament*, and finds it inadequate in many ways, this casual disregard for critical scholarship is somewhat surprising.

Engaging further with Hays, and also with Biggar and Richard Burridge, Landau seeks to 'construct a New Testament Ethic of Disagreement', in which the 'love commandment' features prominently. The love commandment, also known as the Summary of the Law, has become etched in the memories of many Christians, not least Anglicans, for whom it has liturgical use in the Book of Common Prayer. However, it is a principle common to Jesus of Nazareth and at least some of the 'teachers of the law' portrayed somewhat pejoratively in the Gospels. These teachers, as well as Jesus and numerous others, belonged to the same community — those who claimed descent from the Patriarchs and for whom the temple in Jerusalem was the pre-eminent sanctuary. Jesus' approach to rival claimants to teaching authority within that community is portrayed as, at the very least, robust, however the different interlocutors may be identified, their connection with the traditions preserved in the rabbinic literature reconstructed, and the fraught issues relating to the emergence of Christian anti-Semitism addressed without claiming that nothing but historical accident distinguished Jesus from those who, according to the Gospels and corroborated by Josephus, instigated the process that led to his crucifixion.

There has been substantial scholarship on conflict and its role in communities, in defining and clarifying issues of importance for identity and mission, and in crystallising identity and establishing boundaries. These insights have been brought to the study of the New Testament, and are of course just as relevant to the Church today. They could usefully have been brought to this study, and offered rather more than platitudinous and at times censorious comment on the ways in which the Anglican Communion has done its business in recent decades. The public squabbling, most notoriously between homophobic evangelicals and supposedly permissive liberals, has undoubtedly been an impediment to the mission of the Church, however that mission may be understood. Yet questions can also be asked about the credibility of the veneer of unity projected at meetings of the 'Instruments of Communion', from which offending liberals are more likely

to have been excluded than evangelicals whose hatred of homosexuals stops not far short of bloodlust.

One might readily agree that Anglicans need to consider Scripture in relation to tradition and reason/experience, according to the paradigm attributed to Richard Hooker. However, any agreement might soon evaporate, as tradition is as contested as Scripture, and the relationship between the two is far from simple. Reason is inherently culture-bound, and in an Anglican Communion that is increasingly multicultural in its composition and postcolonial in its outlook, the assumptions of the dwindling Church of England are simply not going to be taken seriously.

The appeal to pneumatology is, in principle, of self-evident merit. However, as the author implicitly recognises, claims to inspiration and the guidance of the Holy Spirit, and — by extension — to infallible authority on that basis, are more likely to generate than to resolve conflict, and to be accompanied by autocracy and abuse. The Pauline principle of testing (claims to speak or act in the power of) the Spirit, although far from infallible or necessarily eirenic, would nonetheless have merited some careful consideration. On the other hand, it is difficult to ascertain the relevance of the appeal to Scriptural Reasoning. However worthy this pursuit, it is conducted between parties who are conscious that they come from different faith traditions, revere different texts as holy Scripture, and interpret them accordingly — and, especially in the case of Jews, they neither need nor value agreement in order to sustain their sense of common identity.

The role of the liturgy in creating and expressing peace, and its potential to degenerate into a scandalous sham, are appropriately discussed in the final chapter. Given the role of liturgy as a repository of doctrine, and as the context in which Scripture is definitively received, this is an area that would have merited further exploration, and could perhaps have played a more formative role in this work as a whole.

The Christian Church, from New Testament times until today, and into the future, consists of finite and fallible human beings who are made in the image of the one God but belong to a distinct culture and inherit a unique identity, making decisions with varying degrees of freedom and knowledge, with inevitable compromises, mistakes and moral failings. Anglicans are no different, but Landau suggests that we have a distinct heritage through which we should be able to find unity on fundamental issues and coexist in harmony with disagreement on matters that are less important. This book is a serious attempt to find a way to do this, and merits appreciation.

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Bruce Rogers-Vaughn, *Caring for Souls in a Neoliberal Age*. New Approaches to Religion and Power (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019). 256 pp. Paperback ISBN 978-1-349-71633-3. eBook ISBN 978-1-137-55339-3.

Bruce Rogers-Vaughn is a Baptist minister from the North American 'Deep South', so is perhaps not the most obvious source of wisdom about the pastoral challenges facing the Scottish Episcopal Church. And, certainly, someone who identifies as a 'cissexual white male' of classic 'redneck' pedigree does not immediately fit the 'welcoming and inclusive' image projected by our Church. However, it is precisely in his courageous, withering, but also costly and deeply painful analysis of his own origins, and his reflections on decades in clinical pastoral practice, that Rogers-Vaughn comes to identify the problem that we all face — and although he does not profess to offer any easy solutions, he does emphasise the need to sustain hope.

Rogers-Vaughn notes several trends in the observations he has made over several decades of psychotherapeutic practice — of symptoms of isolation, fragility of relationships, and loss of community, with consequent self-harm and self-blame — which he correlates with the well-documented widening gulf between rich and poor, and with declining education and healthcare provision, with consequent loss of opportunities for social mobility. He identifies as the root cause the neoliberal agenda, initiated by Friedrich Hayek and Milton Friedman and brought to power by Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher, which has seen the institutions of the democratic state subverted by financial interests, so that legislature, judiciary, law enforcement and the military are used to control rather than to serve the people. Education is denuded of critical capacity and serves to generate a pliant workforce, and access to healthcare is reduced to perpetuate poverty. Trade unions and other organs of solidarity among the disenfranchised classes are suppressed, and individualism is actively promoted to fracture relationships, weaken communities and create isolation. Racism, sexism and other forms of discrimination are concealed and entrenched through co-option of a few wealthy and privileged women and black people, who in turn may become enthusiastic agents in the oppression of the powerless.

Although the examples that Rogers-Vaughn cites are mostly North American, and the viciousness of the neoliberal agenda in the UK may be partially veiled by the lingering veneer of benign patriarchy exuded by the monarchy and aristocracy, the reality is that we are in this together, and over the last 40 years the social and economic ills generated by neoliberalism have spread to other parts of the world. The context in which the Church is called to bear witness has been shaped by immensely powerful and irredeemably malign interests. The destruction of communities and of the human capacity to function collectively has weakened the Church itself. Rogers-Vaughn contends that it is only by recognising the underlying causes of social ills, and by naming and challenging them, that the Church, or indeed any secular psychotherapists to whom the poor may have access, will be able to offer any opportunity of healing to individuals and families.

There is much that is sobering in this book, and vested interests would undoubtedly be quick to dismiss as conspiracy theory Rogers-Vaughn's integration of the social and psychological ills afflicting individuals, families and communities with global economic and political issues. However, in a book that was written before the pandemic and during the course of the election which brought Trump to power, he has illuminated many of the issues that became even more obviously related during the pandemic and in the aftermath of the election in which Trump lost power. The challenge to the Church, and to those exercising care, is not merely to speak truth to power, but also to enable those who seek wholeness to find healing in communities that follow Christ in engaging the powers which dominate this world.

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