



*Workshop: National Identity and Euroscepticism: A Comparison Between France and the United Kingdom*  
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## **'Set in the Silver Sea': English National Identity and European Integration**

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Ever since Winston Churchill made it clear that Britain stood for a United Europe, but one without British participation, the question of British Euro-scepticism and its roots has preoccupied observers and scholars alike. Since perceptions and attitudes towards European integration in Wales and Scotland have latterly become increasingly Europhile, I shall confine myself to the problem of purely *English* perceptions and attitudes towards European integration, though many English people from the eighteenth century till today regard 'British' and 'English' as interchangeable terms. Second, the specific question of *English* Euroscepticism needs to be separated from such wider problems as the disjunction between elite and mass support for the European Union, lukewarm support for a European cultural identity, and widespread perceptions of a serious 'democratic deficit' in European institutions (a problem hardly remedied by the recent attempt of the European Parliament to assume a greater role). Third, in attempting to account for the bases of English attitudes, we need to move beyond the narrower issue of the European Union and European integration, to the broader question of the underlying English images of 'Europe' and their historical roots. Here, the evidence is less readily ascertainable and as a result analysis must be increasingly conjectural. I can only hope that my exploratory reflections may prompt further questions and research.<sup>1</sup>

### **Euroscepticism**

It will help to start with the term 'Euroscepticism' itself. Both parts of the term are problematic. In its specific sense, the noun 'sceptic', the dictionary tells us, recalls the philosophical school of Pyrrho and his successors, who asserted nothing positively and doubted the possibility of knowledge. More generally, it signifies one who inclines to disbelieve or who withholds from prevailing doctrines; scepticism, accordingly, is a general disposition to doubt. However, in the case under consideration, more than an intellectual disposition is involved. Euroscepticism, in general parlance, also signifies an emotional detachment from particular claims, doctrines and ideals, and a certain coolness towards their devotees.<sup>2</sup>

The second, and more complex, problem is the nature of the ideals and doctrines which are disbelieved. These doctrines are both socio-political and normative, and they are pursued on two levels, the political and the cultural. The first of these is that the European Union, as both an economic and political project, has become an irreversible movement of history; and that, in general, this is a good thing. The second holds that 'Europe' constitutes an underlying cultural identity which is being realised, that Europe's time has come, and that loyalty to and identity with Europe will subsume national loyalties and identities, even if it will never eradicate them; and, again, that this is very much a necessary and positive development. In what follows, I shall be more concerned with the second of these two sets of propositions. But I should start by saying a few words about the first, since much store is laid by it and, in any case, the two sets of propositions overlap. I should add that, in this first set, it is more 'Britain' and 'British' power relations that are under scrutiny than those of England.<sup>3</sup>

## **Two visions of European integration**

When the pros and cons of the European Union are not being discussed simply in terms of economic benefits and costs or short-term political issues, the contrast often drawn in political debates and the media in England contrasts an 'inward-looking' from an 'outward-looking' type of Union. This is, in part, a legacy of the late admission of Britain to the then Common Market, in part the reaction of an outsider to the couple 'France-Germany'. Indeed, as Philip Bell argues, France from the late 1940s, in pursuing a policy of rapprochement and then partnership with Germany, has inevitably relegated, if not replaced, its former entente with Britain, citing first the latter's empire, and latterly its close ties with America. Certainly, the tenor of Franco-British relations plays a large part in current English Eurosceptic attitudes. (Bell 1997)

For English elites, free trade and consequent loose political association have been the desired models, with the failed EFTA as its historical expression, and divergence through enlargement and the possibility of a 'two-speed Europe' its present manifestations. In England, this model is often starkly opposed to a 'Continental' model of protectionism, governmental control and harmonisation of the policies of the 'inner Six', the original signatories of the Treaty of Rome and the principal motor of ever closer union. What has caused growing friction is not just the regulative aspects of the European Commission's projects, but their extension into political and, possibly, cultural spheres. Here, English Eurosceptics discern a specific threat to the unique character of English institutions, in particular to English common law and the British Parliament, and to a lesser extent, the English educational system.<sup>4</sup>

We should remember that, in this field, images often count for more than policies and activities. One powerfully persuasive image is the that of a tranquil and well ordered England threatened by Continental despotism and anarchy, a contrast that goes back to Burke and Lord Acton and was echoed, in different ways, by Elie Kedourie and Mrs. Thatcher. To support this view, the periodic political disturbances of post-Revolutionary France, not to mention Germany, are held up as a warning, but also as a source of English satisfaction. After all, was not England's blood-letting far back enough in time no longer to cloud the public memory or obscure the glorious march of parliamentarism and the rule of law in England? And is this not another example of the triumph of 'common sense' over doctrine, and is not ever-closer Union just such another disturbing dogma which it would be folly to embrace? (See Acton 1948; Kedourie 1960)

Of course, there are other, more moderate and liberal English images, which emphasize the common bond among all Europeans of secular democracy, liberty, human rights and social welfare. However, even in these cases, there is a difference, not just in the greater emphasis in England and English law on the individual and individual rights, but on the absolute nature of sovereignty and the relationship of national identity to an overall European identity. This is where the second set of propositions, about Europe's cultural identity and its mooted incorporation of national identities, becomes relevant.

### **'Europe-as-Christendom'**

The recent debates about the commencement of negotiations for the admission of Turkey to the European Union have been couched in the familiar language of liberty, democracy and human rights, but here and there a different, more encompassing note is struck. When statesmen like former French President Giscard d'Estaing oppose admission on the grounds that Europe is Christian and that a populous Muslim nation would change its character, this is not just the common currency of an inward-looking 'old Europe', but a modern echo of a grand European narrative that stretches back to the Middle Ages, some would say to Charlemagne. It is the grand narrative of what Mary Anne Perkins, in a monumental survey of modern western European thought on the subject, terms 'Europe-as-Christendom'. It is a narrative that did not die with the Revolution, but was transformed into a secular account of European democracy, rationality, the rule of law and personal freedom, derived from the medieval division of authority in Christendom, spiritual and temporal, and ultimately from its Greek and Roman, and its Jewish and Christian roots.<sup>5</sup>

Now, in this conception, it is not Christianity as a community of faith that is relevant, but Christendom as a historic realm of sovereignty which embraces cultural diversity within unity. Despite the actual conflicts of medieval Papacy and Holy Roman Empire, and a constant insistence on

independence by the French kings, this ideal *Respublica Christiana* reflected the unity of the temporal and spiritual spheres under the sovereignty of the universal Church, symbolised by the Pope's 'gift' in 800 AD of the Roman empire to Charlemagne. Now, this link with the sacred was preserved in the era of popular sovereignty, well after the Revolution. Similarly, Herder's 'Republic of Intellectuals' which presented this history of Europe as 'universal history', has continued to exert a disproportionate influence on European political conceptions and policies down to our day; witness the importance of Jacques Maritain, Ortega y Gasset and Denis de Rougemont on the evolution of the European idea or 'the spirit of Europe'. Like so many others, they traced that history to its roots in the dual realm of 'Christendom'. Presenting evidence drawn from a wide array of thinkers and statesmen, particularly in France, Germany and Italy, Mary Anne Perkins goes on to claim that:

"This secularised narrative of Christendom - which, I shall argue, not only survived but informed the Enlightenment - still has resonance with many Europeans at both conscious and unconscious levels. Despite the weakening of its spiritual roots, it has continued to shape European identity-consciousness and to influence perceptions of Europe in relation to its 'Others'". (Perkins 2004, 5)

Now, of course, this was and is not, as she emphasizes, a conception or a history that was widely shared in England. It was not just that the monarch had replaced the Pope as Supreme Governor of the Church of England, which thenceforth became a purely national church. After 1688, "patriotism allied itself to the Protestant cause"; and "'Christendom' became more a reference to a community of faith, a chosen people...led by English patriots", in opposition to the Church of Rome. With the age of nationalism, national churches of the 'peoples' replaced for the English the bond of universal Christendom that had united Europe, and by the twentieth century any English support for European federation had become purely secular, having been cut off from its Christian roots. (Perkins 2004, 40, 42)

To this largely intellectual history, we should briefly add a historical and sociological dimension. From the high Middle Ages on, the centres of wealth, population and technology in Europe have been mainly Western. They have centred on a line running from north Italy to Belgium and the Netherlands, from the Po along the Rhineland to the Scheldt, comprising the Europe of Burgundy and the Hanseatic League, Empire and Papacy. Despite a high degree of political violence in the feudal era, social bonds were relatively stable and assured under the aegis of a transterritorial Latin Christendom. This was because its network of cities and manorial estates were enfolded in the common status system fostered by a feudalism underpinned by Christendom with its transcendental vision of dual sovereignty that had, as its obverse, the increasingly sharp demarcation and stigmatisation of non-Christian outsiders, opposing Islam and persecuting Jews and heretics.<sup>6</sup>

It is of interest here that this example of an overarching West European civilisation of Christendom undoubtedly influenced parts of the European movement after the Second World War, providing it with myths and memories of a 'golden age' of European unity, based on histories of Christendom like those of Christopher Dawson and Denis de Rougemont that were still influential in the 1960s. Moreover, the much desired rejuvenation of Europe was centred on and confined to the West, and not just because of the atheist menace of communist domination of Eastern Europe. By the same token, Britain was excluded: Mary Anne Perkins quotes both Friedrich Heer and the nineteenth century French historian, Frederic Ozanam, as dating the essential difference between Britain and Western Europe from the time of the 'escape' of Britain and Ireland from the sovereignty of Charlemagne, the ancestor and presiding spirit of the 'Europe-as-Christendom' narrative. (Perkins 2004, 5-6, and chs.13, 15)

### **'Our Island Story'**

Be that as it may, English suspicion of European Christian transcendentalism and universalism sprang from deeper roots than the 'accident' of the borders of Charlemagne's realm. Rather we must seek to understand its causes in the ensemble of factors that have gone into the making of an English national identity as it has evolved over the last millennium; for no single factor can account for so multifaceted and flexible an identity. This means that, if we are to locate the peculiar nature of English ambivalence to European integration and English disbelief of its underlying imagery and ideal, we must reach back to the Reformation and beyond. It also means employing an approach that recognises the complexity and layered development of concepts like national identity, which I would

define as 'the continuous reproduction and reinterpretation of the pattern of myths, memories, symbols and values that compose the distinctive heritage of the nation, and the identification of its individuals with that pattern and heritage'. Similarly, the concept of the nation is best defined in ideal-typical manner as 'a named and self-defined community of shared history and destiny, whose members cultivate common myths, symbols and traditions, occupy a common homeland, possess a distinctive public culture, and share common laws and customs'. (Connor 1994, ch.4; ADS 2001, ch.1)

Our analysis may conveniently start with the question of a homeland; in this case the geopolitics and self-images of an island people. From the time that Britain became an island off the European continent in the Mesolithic epoch, it has experienced continual traffic and movements of ideas and peoples from its neighbours, most decisively from Rome. Indeed, Rome's imperial occupation and especially its later Christian mission under St. Augustine which gave England's kingdoms their diocesan organisation shaped the first and most influential literary concept of Englishness in the Venerable Bede's history of the *gens Anglorum*. Conversely, the territorial acquisitions of Henry II in the twelfth century united large parts of the former Frankish kingdom with his English realm, opening the way for the Hundred Years War, in what John Gillingham has termed England's first empire. (Gillingham 1992)

These are just some of what Fredrik Barth (1969) would term boundary transactions across the ethnic border, but they did not, and do not, lessen the continuous impact of an offshore island location, so memorably caught by Gildas in the mid-sixth century when he writes that the island of Britain

"lies virtually at the end of the world, towards the west and northwest... It is fortified on all sides by a vast and more or less uncrossable ring of sea, apart from the straits on the south where one can cross to Belgic Gaul". (Gildas 1978, cited in Howe (1989, 39)

Not factual but sentient history, not what is, but what is felt to be, Walker Connor reminds us, is the crucial dimension of ethnic and national identity. A sense of the 'uncrossable ring of sea' has been perhaps the most potent of England's historic ethnoscapes, both as military bastion and as peaceful idyll, and both of them were so memorably invoked in John of Gaunt's eulogy of England:

"This fortress built by Nature for herself  
Against infection and the hand of war;  
This happy breed of men, this little world,  
This precious stone set in the silver sea,  
Which serves it in the office of a wall,  
Or as a moat defensive to a house,  
Against the envy of less happier lands;  
This blessed plot, this earth, this realm, this England,  
.....  
England, bound in with the triumphant sea,  
Whose rocky shore beats back the envious siege  
Of watery Neptune, is now bound in with shame."  
(Richard II, Act II, Sc.i)

Where Neptune failed, the Danes and the Normans succeeded. So, too, as they frequently reminded themselves, had the Anglo-Saxons. They too had raided and invaded the shores of the British isles, crossing the seas and gradually driving the Romanised Britons into Wales, Cumbria and Cornwall. Indeed, the Old English poem *Exodus*, an Old Testament analogy painted on a Germanic military canvas, depicted a latter-day chosen people who, like the ancient Israelites at the Red Sea, crossed the waters in their ships to a promised land. (Howe 1989; Connor 1994, ch.8)

But the Anglo-Saxon poem is also concerned with sea-faring, an activity and theme that came to preoccupy the English far more than many of their West European counterparts, with the exception perhaps of the Dutch and the Portuguese. Certainly, as a patriotic note began to enter into the self-images of the antagonists in the last part of the Hundred Years War, after the meteoric appearance of Jeanne d'Arc, and as the English kingdom ceased to be a land-based Continental power, the English fell back on sea-faring and, from the sixteenth century, on naval power. Bad weather, perhaps a surer bulwark than the Channel, had over the centuries prevented many a mooted invasion, but Henry

VIII's rapid expansion of the fleet and its cannon and Elisabeth's policies on firearms for the militia, certainly encouraged English elites in Shakespeare's time to regard their island as an unconquerable fortress, a perception widely confirmed by the miraculous dispersal of Philip II's great Armada in 1588. It is from this time, too, that the familiar English preoccupation with Continental hegemony can be dated, namely, the increasingly consistent policy of opposing any power that would dominate Western Europe, control the ports of the Low Countries, and challenge English, and later British, trade and naval supremacy. English, and then British, reliance on naval power, and the concomitant fascination with the surrounding seascapes, so well captured in Turner's *Views of Britain* in the 1820s, have been powerful factors in the territorialisation of English, and British, memories of war and deliverance from the Armada to Trafalgar and Dunkirk. (Adams 2002, 203-10)

### **An early national state**

A second element in the formation of English national identity is the early development of the state, forged in constant warfare. Starting from the kingdom of Wessex, Alfred's successors were able to hold the Danes at bay long enough to consolidate a specifically English state under an English king, *rex Anglorum*, buttressed by English law and custom. This development was, if anything, intensified by the Norman kings, from William the Conqueror's *Domesday Book* through to Henry II's treaties of overlordship of Wales, Scotland and Ireland in 1175, through to Magna Carta and the statutes of Edward I. In this process, the centralisation of the kingdom's finances and more particularly of its law, a specifically English law, took on special significance. Alfred had introduced an all-English lawcode, based on the laws of the several Anglo-Saxon kingdoms, as well as on the laws in the book of Exodus and the New Testament. But, during the Norman period, a body of written law developed with its codification of custom, controlled by the royal court, its assizes, trial by jury, and the rise of professional functionaries. "By the thirteenth century", writes Rees Davies, "English law was regarded as one of the distinctive hallmarks of Englishness and as an integral part of English political culture". (Davies 1998, 106)<sup>7</sup>

By the fourteenth century, the expansion of a national state is evident, as English became the language of court and administration, and London the stable capital of a unitary state. At the same time, a concept of sacred kingship developed, notably under Richard II and Henry V. However, this process was interrupted by the Wars of the Roses, and was only brought to fruition with the resumption of the drive for a strong centralised state under the Tudors, especially after the break with Rome.

Undoubtedly, a new dimension, some would say transformation, in the development of an English national state was initiated by Henry VIII's replacement of the Catholic church in England with a national Church of which he became the Supreme Governor, along with the dissolution of the monasteries which so greatly strengthened the position and wealth of the monarchy. Edward Foxe in 1534 implied that 'emperors' ruled subordinate territories, and not long after Henry incorporated Wales and claimed feudal overlordship of Scotland and kingship of Ireland. Indeed, Henry saw himself as a latter-day King David, and "read the Psalms as a commentary on his own divine mission and regality". (Guy 2002, 119) Yet it was really only in the reign of Edward VI, likened to King Josiah, and even more after the return of the Marian exiles at the accession of Elisabeth, that Protestantism became closely linked to the national state in the compromise Anglican settlement. In Elisabeth's eyes, hers was a 'sacral monarchy', and for most of her subjects, both the monarchy and the Virgin Queen herself were regarded as signs of divine favour to England. This encouraged a significant strengthening of an English national state increasingly identified with the nation through its theatrical displays of royal power, as in Elisabeth's processions around her realm, and through its attempts at cultural regulation of society. At the same time, the wider diffusion of that state-sponsored identity through the successive Protestant translations of the Bible culminating in the King James Version, as well as the introduction of the Book of Common Prayer, helped to ensure a deeper and broader adherence to a Protestant version of a sense of English national identity.<sup>8</sup>

### **The antiquity of English identity**

Equally significant for the character of English identity was its perceived antiquity, at least among the gentry and educated strata. This is not the place to enter into the debate about the dating of an English 'nationalism'. Recently, Krishan Kumar has disputed Liah Greenfeld's early sixteenth century dating, arguing for the appearance of a specifically *English* nationalism only in the late nineteenth century, whereas Greenfeld had claimed that England saw the very first case of

nationalism already in the 1520s and 1530s, even before the Henrician Reformation. Interestingly, Kumar is somewhat more sympathetic to Hans Kohn's seventeenth-century dating. This suggests a certain confusion in the argument, due in part to a lack of clear definition of key terms, but even more to a tendency to switch between the dating of an English 'nation' and that of an English 'nationalism', and a concomitant failure to distinguish *nationalism*, the ideology and movement, from a wider 'national consciousness' and 'national sentiment'. Whereas in, say, much of Africa and parts of Asia, we may speak of nationalism without nations, with 'national consciousness' confined to tiny educated elites, in the English case the reverse appears to be the case: the rise of an English nation and a sense of common national identity, along with varying degrees of national consciousness and sentiment, but little in the way of nationalist ideological movements. To this characterisation, mid-seventeenth century England is, I think, the exception. The forcing house of Civil War seems to have encouraged the rise of ideological nationalist movements, the ideology in question being biblical and puritan, and held by a significant minority which was briefly empowered. (Kohn 1940; Greenfeld 1992, ch.1; Kumar 2003, ch.5; cf. A.D.Smith 2001, ch.1)

In making this claim, I am certainly not suggesting that we should commit ourselves to Adrian Hastings' thesis that Anglo-Saxon England constituted the first European *nation* (he mentions the earlier cases of Armenia and Ethiopia, and of course the ancient Jews), on the ground that it possessed a vernacular literature and modelled itself on the biblical prototype of the chosen people of ancient Israel; nor to his even more controversial argument that there was an English *nationalism* in the time of Athelstan. But I think we do have to recognise the growth of a sense of common English *ethnic* identity forged, as we saw, in and through a relatively unified polity and law already in the late Anglo-Saxon period, compared to other kingdoms of the period. It was an ethnic identity that was reinforced by the Normans in the succeeding centuries, in such a way that the English found it increasingly difficult to assimilate their neighbours in a non-discriminatory manner. Speaking of this medieval English national state, Rees Davies claims:

"It had already by the tenth century forged its identity, as the polity of the *gens Anglorum*, the *Angelcynn*, and had bedecked itself with an ethnic and salvational pedigree, the one proclaimed in the centrality it gave to the *adventus Saxonum* in its construction of the past, the other in its cultivation of itself as the new Israel. Its cultic unifying figure was quite simply the king of the English, *rex Anglorum*. Its law was likewise, and ever more so a specifically English law, *lex anglicana* .... Increasingly the English language.... likewise became part of English identity..." (Davies 1998, 199-200; Hastings 1997, ch.2)

In other words, the foundations of an English national identity had been laid early, even if the community of England did not approximate to the ideal type of the *nation* for several more centuries. It began to do so in the later fourteenth and early fifteenth century, and was expressed in the flowering of an English literature, in the long wars with France, and in the policy of strengthening the (Old) English, their language and customs, against the 'fickle' and 'degenerate' Irish in medieval Ireland. (Lydon 1995) However, an English national profile became more pronounced and more continuously visible only after the Tudor unification; and with it went a reputation for xenophobia, noted by an anonymous Italian around 1500:

"They have an antipathy to foreigners, and imagine that they never come into their island, but to make themselves masters of it, and to usurp their goods..." (Loades 1982, 298, citing *A relation of the Island of England*, ed. C.A. Sneyd, Camden Series (1847))

### **Puritan covenantalism**

It was over a long period, then, that a sense of English national identity had evolved, albeit unevenly, and it was on this foundation that Puritan covenantalism was able to forge a movement of national autonomy, identity and enforced unity, if only for a short period, acting like the tip of a battering ram. By the end of the sixteenth century, a growing number of Puritans had begun to energise the pre-existing sense of English national identity, in opposition to Catholicism. Already a pamphlet of 1554 had prayed "O lord, defend thy elect people of Ingland from the handes and force of thy enemyes the Papistes" (cited in Loades 1982, 304). Unlike Catholic hierarchical understandings, Puritan forms of collective identity in England were popular and covenantal. They harked back to the Old Testament with its portrait of an ideal ancient Israel, God's chosen people dwelling in their own land, obeying God's law, conquering or separating themselves from their idolatrous neighbours. The English Puritan concept of ethnic election was similarly conditional: God would cherish his chosen English

people only so long as they obeyed His commandments and performed the tasks with which He had entrusted them, in this case the strict observance of the true faith, its defence against Popish enemies, and where necessary, its imposition on unwilling parts of the English commonwealth, such as Ireland. (Loades 1982; Greenfeld 1992, ch.1; see A.D.Smith 2003, ch.5)

In the following century, Cromwell and his armies undertook to do God's work and fulfil England's mission. By the time of the English Revolution, the assumption that England was chosen, as Cromwell declared to the Little Parliament in 1653, and that "Truly, you are called by God as Judah was, to rule with Him, and for Him...", was widely held. (Cited in Kohn 1944, 176) As Michael Walzer has shown, a theology of conditional election is energising and mobilising, because only through obedience to God's commandments can blessing and privilege be obtained, while disobedience will bring down catastrophe on the people. This belief in national election was not always confined to the English; it could include the even more fervently covenantal Scots. For Milton, "Britain's God...hath yet ever had this island under the special indulgent eye of his providence"; and he was only echoing the arguments of Robert Pont, Bishop of Galloway, whose treatise *Of the Union of Britayne* (1604) likened England and Scotland to Judah and Israel, and cited Ezekiel 36, 22, to the effect that "they shall be no more two people, neither divided any more henceforth in two kingdoms". (Hill 1994, 275-6; Walzer 1985)

It is true that English Puritans sometimes saw themselves, rather than the whole nation, as God's elect. Yet, if we define *nationalism* as 'an ideological movement for attaining and maintaining autonomy, unity and identity on behalf of a human population some of whose members deem it to constitute an actual or potential nation', then we may characterise popular Puritan covenantalism in England as an early European case of religious nationalism - examples of which we continue to witness in the modern world. Of course, England's was by no means the sole case in this period; apart from Scotland, there were vivid examples in the Netherlands, among the Ulster Scots and in the American colonies, while in Sweden, Denmark, Finland and parts of Germany Lutheran Protestantism became the dominant religion, as did Zwinglian Calvinism in parts of Switzerland. Indeed, at this time, Protestantism in its various forms can be described as an international movement. So, why then single out the Protestant Reformation in England?<sup>9</sup>

The answer, I think, is that among *national states*, it was in England that the massive Puritan reinforcement of a pre-existing national identity had its strongest and most durable effects. Paradoxically, it also helped to reinforce English individualism, which in turn owed so much to the English pursuit of commercial opportunities, both private and state-sponsored, especially overseas. Even after the Restoration of the king, the Lords and the Anglican church in 1660, there remained a heightened sense of English national identity and election which carried over into a Protestant Britain after the Glorious Revolution and the Union with Scotland, and was to continue to fuel opposition to Spain and then France, the great Catholic powers that dominated the western half of the Continent. This chimed well with growing anti-papist sentiment at home, and the increasingly violent exclusion of Catholics from the body politic, which, according to Anthony Marx, was necessary if the political elites were to mobilise the populace in support of their power and the state. At this time 'faith in nation' became, he argues, a political imperative, as popular prejudice was harnessed to political policy. However, this rather underplays the antiquity of popular passions and national identity, as well as the independent power of Protestant faith, once unleashed; and it fails to link Protestant doctrines with English nation-building and nationalism. (Marx 2003)

In fact, without the powerful injection of a Puritan religious nationalism, there could have been no Glorious Revolution, no Protestant Succession, no Protestant nation of Britain of the kind analysed by Linda Colley and J.C.D.Clark, nor indeed the Protestant revival of Victorian times. Nor, most likely, would there have been that self-imposed imperial British mission of bringing British civilisation and its true faith to the 'heathen' inhabitants of Africa and India, a mission so succinctly epitomised in Thomas Jones Barker's painting, *The Secret of England's Greatness: Queen Victoria Presenting a Bible* (c.1863), which shows Queen Victoria bestowing a copy of the Protestant Bible upon a kneeling former Muslim chief, probably from Africa and perhaps from Zanzibar, in the Audience Chamber of Windsor Castle, in the presence of Prince Albert on the left, and on the right, Lord John Russell and Viscount Palmerston. We may note, in passing, that it is the secret of *England's* greatness; Scots might run the empire, but by now election seems to have been reserved for England. (Clark 2000; Colley 1992)

## Religion, state and nation

What I am arguing here is that the English case manifests a potent conjunction of state, nation and reformed religion, in which Protestantism was institutionalised in a specific national church, the Anglican Church, and the monarchical state defined itself and the nation in terms of a particular version of the Christian faith. It is the fusion of a *dissenting religion* with a national identity that was tightly knit with a monarchical state of its own that proved to be crucial for the subsequent shaping of attitudes to Europe, as well as to outsiders in general. Moreover, this was a national religion that opposed the dominant ecclesiastical international hierarchy and doctrine of the time and for a long time thereafter, and, partly as a result, the successive great powers that supported it and were part of it. In other words, Protestantism added a powerful new layer to the palimpsest of an English national identity, one that energised the people and was to provide a potent rationale for subsequent British foreign policies in the concert of European states and for later maritime expansion, imperial annexations and large-scale conversions.

This affords a further clue to an understanding of the roots of that English disbelief in Europeanism that we have observed, for it places English 'exceptionalism' within a broader pattern of national attitudes to the ideal of 'Europe'. Stated baldly, those peoples whose monarchical states were defined after the Reformation by the adoption of a dissenting Protestantism as their national religion, have been less committed to the ideals of European integration than the Catholic nations, because their popular sense of national identity was tied to the sovereignty of national states that adopted a dissenting religion and defined its identity through it. Thus, in both Denmark and Sweden, where the Reformation was used by the monarchy to strengthen its power and wealth under Christian II and Gustavus Vasa, Lutheran Protestantism was adopted as the official state religion in the 1530s, and in early modern Sweden the Lutheran state church exercised considerable moral and social control in what Sorenson terms a 'popular master-subject' Swedish identity. In Sweden, too, this early modern national identity was reinforced by medieval chronicles, demarcating Sweden from Denmark, and in the next century by Olof Rudbeck's use of *gotisk* mythology and Viking sagas to trace the genesis of Sweden, as well as by Gustavus Adolphus' wars against the 'dark' Catholic powers. (Sorenson 1994, 55-56; Seton-Watson 1977, 69-70)

In these cases, state and nation were conjoined through a dissenting national religion. It is not simply a case of the symbiosis between state and nation; after all, nowhere is this fit closer than in France. Nor is it simply a question of a national religion, one that is linked to the state. Poland's Church has been close to the state, except under communism; and Catholicism, the national religion, has been a powerful force in shaping the modern Polish nation. France, too, has had its own Gallican church, long subordinated to the state by the 'most Christian king', starting with Philip the Fair, if not earlier; and though the Church was disestablished in 1905, Catholicism remains the majority religion of nativity in France. But neither of these was a dissenting, oppositional religion, one tied, as it were, to the masthead of a sovereign nation and turned into the defiant symbol and expression of that absolute sovereignty, to signify a breach, an act of secession and independence from a transterritorial realm of Catholic Christendom. That dissent, and the obstinate opposition to the Papacy and the Catholic great powers that it generated, gave to these pre-existing national identities a political energy and longevity that has not been fully spent even today, when their spiritual roots have weakened. (Strayer 1971; Beaune 1985)

Two countercases may be brought against this argument. The first is that of Scotland, whose dominant and dissenting church in the seventeenth century was closely allied in spirit, if not always in policy, to that of its southern neighbour. Yet it never possessed quite the same symbolic value, in that the dissenting church was independent of the crown, indeed opposed to it at first. Perhaps it is also worth noting that only a few decades ago Scotland was no more Europhile than England; and we may suggest that at least some of the present favourable attitudes of educated Scots to the ideal of European integration might be a consequence of the loss of the British empire in which Scots played so important a role, and of antipathy to English hegemony and state penetration in Scotland.<sup>10</sup>

The second exception is the Netherlands, whose people were among the first and, till quite recently, the most fervent believers in the European ideal. There is no question that Calvinism was a dissenting religion, that its ideal was modelled on the Old Testament narrative of the chosen people, and that this form of popular covenantal religion helped to energise large numbers of the Dutch



against the oppressive regime of the Spanish Habsburgs. Of course, it was only one of several ideologies under which the Dutch revolt was carried out, yet it was undoubtedly the most powerful mobilising agent, and the revolt found a strong leader in the house of Orange. But, Calvinism never became the defining symbol of the republic and the nation that it immediately became in under the English monarchy after Henry's repudiation of Rome. For one thing, Catholics continued to account for one third of the population of the independent Netherlands. For another, a spirit of tolerance was early in evidence in parts of the Netherlands, something that came much later in England. Subsequently, society in the Netherlands came to rest on the three so-called 'pillars' of Protestant, Catholic and secular cultures, and later still has assumed a more multicultural character, as a result of large-scale immigration. The result was that dissenting religion could never remain the symbol and focus of Netherlandish sovereignty that it has continued to be in England.<sup>11</sup>

Whatever the status of the wider hypothesis, the peculiar conjunction of factors that help to account for English detachment from 'Europe' and its singular pursuit of its different course, is clear enough. There is, first, its island location and a consequent English preoccupation with naval power and maritime supremacy, as well as a long tradition of seafaring and love of the sea. Second, the early development of a specifically English law, English language and a strong, unitary English state serviced by professional legal staff of the royal court working from a stable capital city, provided strong bulwarks for the emergence of an English national identity. Third, there was the very longevity of an English ethnic identity, and its slow, if uneven development among the elites, accompanied by a degree of xenophobia, especially in crises or when there was a perception of threat. Together, these factors combined to create a strong sense of national belonging among the educated classes and, under the Tudors, a distinctive public culture and literature, even before the impact of an energising Puritan covenantal nationalism was felt across the land.

#### **France and England: parallels and differences**

It is instructive to compare these developments with those in medieval and early modern France. French nationalism is often held to be quintessentially 'civic', a term that carries several connotations, some of them quite misleading. It is misleading if it implies that the French conception of nationhood lacks an ethnic basis, even if the population of France, like the English, was not derived from a single ethnic group. Indeed, ethnicity continued to play a large part in French conceptions well into the nineteenth century, as the Jews found to their cost.

Nor does civic mean purely territorial; *ius soli* may be well entrenched, but it carries with it an assumption of acceptance of a common French language and culture, as it does in 'Britain', which provides an equivalent framework for a civic identity.

If, on the other hand, civic implies a state-based nation and a territorial nationalism, then the English case has been as much civic as its French counterpart. In both cases, we can speak of an early development of the strong, centralised state, long centred on a historic capital, and serviced by professional lawyers. In the French case, this state can be traced to Louis VII, to Philip Augustus' victories in the early thirteenth century and to the resistance of Philip the Fair to the Papacy; it expressed a growing sense of elite national identity centred on 'the most Christian king' and the 'chosen kingdom', the most devoted kingdom in the realm of Christendom, and spreading unevenly among French elites after the Hundred Years War. Throughout the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, a powerful French kingdom stood out against the Habsburgs and subordinated the Gallican church. But in the end, once the large Protestant minority had, after long and bloody struggles, been first contained, and ultimately expelled, France assumed a leading role within a European Catholic Christendom, providing the model of a Christian European aristocratic civilisation.<sup>12</sup>

That, surely, is where, despite the many parallels, the trajectories of the two kingdoms diverged, and England began to embark on an alternative course. Part of the difference lies in their respective geopolitical locations: France's geography required a large army to ensure the borders of a land-based Continental power, while maintaining a navy to promote trade and pursue a long imperial rivalry with Britain overseas. Perhaps we should not make too much of this rivalry. After all, there were other imperial European competitors, but they have not pursued an alternative destiny, outside 'Europe-as-Christendom'. Certainly, there are echoes today of the old colonial rivalries between Britain and France, as well as memories of the Napoleonic and earlier wars; and today France is often

perceived in England to be the main promoter of the European project which in turn is sometimes seen as a latter-day expression of a French desire for European leadership and the recovery of its former *grandeur* lost after the War. But, the reasons for English detachment and scepticism do not lie here; they go back further and stem ultimately from its pattern of national identity formation, and more especially from the way in which a dissenting religion became an integral part of the state structures and national identities in Protestant monarchies. When England was detached from Rome, it also separated as both state and nation from the Catholic realm, a separation certainly made easier, as in Scandinavia, by its location and distance from the central axis of 'Europe-as-Christendom', and by the evolution of its national identity under the aegis of a strong and durable state. What lent that separation energy and force was not just a muscular assertion of royal authority, but the injection of a popular covenantal religion into an existing sense of English national identity and into the body politic.

To this, one could object that the Enlightenment and the Revolution, drawing their inspiration from the stoic morality of republican Rome and Sparta, provided a French counterpart to England's radical secession. Even if the extreme Jacobin anti-Christian campaign was short-lived and Napoleon made his peace with the Vatican, after the July Revolution Catholic monarchy was rejected, and after 1870 France was firmly set upon its secularist republican course. Yet, we should recall that even after the disestablishment of the Church following the Dreyfus Affair, conservative Catholicism remained a powerful force, from the Action Francaise to the Vichy regime. But more important, as we saw, secular versions of the 'Europe-as-Christendom' narrative flourished in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, preaching the values of liberty under the rule of law, but also of diversity within an overarching unity - a conception could lead to the increasing subordination of national sovereignty, if not identity, to a supranational and transterritorial European union under a bureaucratic High Authority, such as Jean Monnet conceived it, in which each of the levels of loyalty and identity play their allotted roles. It is a conception that accords well with the old ideal of *la grande nation* with its *mission civilisatrice* and its post-Revolutionary ideals of exporting liberty, reason and enlightenment across the Continent. Did not Georges Bidault remark in 1948: "When I speak of Europe, I mean Europe, capital Paris, for it is in Paris that the Sixteen have their capital." (Bell 1997, 101)<sup>13</sup>

## Conclusion

In this brief analysis of a vast terrain, I have emphasized the separation of England from both France and the larger project of European integration, by singling out certain factors at the collective level, stemming from England's island location, its strong national state, and above all, the rift with Rome and the Puritan mission of national liberty and election. In so doing, I have neglected other vital factors such as war and modernisation, notably the massive impact and bitter legacies of two world wars and the consequent negative English attitudes to its former industrial rival, Germany, which, some would argue, are more relevant to the detachment of England from 'Europe' today, particularly at the popular level.

Moreover, there has always been a great deal of cultural commonalty and exchange between England and 'Europe' over many centuries, while at the level of the individual, the contrasts I have drawn are far less sharp, the attitudes more muted. For, just as in France, many individuals are less committed to the project of ever closer European union than is commonly thought, so in England, there is much more positive sentiment towards both France and 'Europe' than this analysis might suggest. After all, there is a widespread feeling of participating in a single civilisation of Europe going back nearly two thousand years, and many members of the English elites, at least, consider themselves 'European' in cultural outlook and artistic tastes.

We may conclude where we began. Churchill captured this positive pro-European sentiment in his famous Zurich speech of 19 September, 1946, calling for the uniting of Europe through a partnership of a rejuvenated France and Germany and praising the Pan-European movement of Coudenhove-Kalergi:

"It (sc.Europe) is the fountain of Christian faith and Christian ethics. It is the origin of most of the culture, the arts, philosophy and science both of ancient and modern time. If Europe were once united in the sharing of its common inheritance, there would be no limit to the happiness, to the prosperity and the glory which its three or four hundred million people would enjoy". (Cited in Perkins 2004, 104)<sup>14</sup>

Yet, the same Winston Churchill made it clear that while Britain sponsored and supported European unity, it would not be a participant in any pan-European or federal project. Already in 1930 he had set down a basic British, or should I now say English, attitude to this mooted 'European commonalty':

"We have our own dream and our own task. We are with Europe, but not of it. We are linked, but not comprised. We are interested and associated, but not absorbed." (Saturday Evening Post, Feb.15, 1930, cited in Perkins 2004, 104)

Has anything changed in the interim? To a certain extent, it has. Under the impact of mass immigration, tolerance of other faiths, low church attendance and trading on Sundays, and a more open society and permissive morality, the spiritual foundations of a Protestant England and a Protestant monarchy have been weakened. Yet, collective mentalities, like national landscapes, die hard. There remains a distinct lack of widespread enthusiasm in England for European integration and a European identity, and instead a continuing quest for an alternative national destiny which today, without an empire, is now more problematic and elusive. However, as a result of the long-standing effects of historical separations, it is likely to be still a destiny linked to Europe, but not of it.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> On the disjunction of elites and masses and the variable and generally lukewarm support for the European Union, see Deflem and Pampol (1996). For the broader economic, political and cultural dimensions of European integration and identity, see the essays in Gowan and Anderson (1997).

<sup>2</sup> Chambers Concise Dictionary (Cambridge 1988), under 'sceptic'. The Concise Oxford Dictionary (Oxford: Clarendon Press 1988) adds under 'sceptic': "person who doubts truth of Christian or of all religious doctrines", and "unconvinced of truth of particular fact or theory".

<sup>3</sup> For critical assessments of the European project and identity, see Delanty (1995) and A.D.Smith (1995, ch.5).

<sup>4</sup> Though I should add that, with the exception of French resistance to American influence in the field of the media, the policies and activities of the European Commission in the cultural field have been increasingly those of a facilitator of existing cultural networks and projects of different European groups, regions and states.

<sup>5</sup> In her massive study of the intellectual history of Western European contributions to the grand narrative of 'Christendom-as-Europe', Mary Anne Perkins shows how it has lived on and taken new secular forms over the last two centuries - along with its age-old exclusions of Jews, Muslims and Russians.

<sup>6</sup> For the medieval European centres, see Bartlett (1994, 250-55); see also Wallace (1990). For the persecution of Jews, heretics and lepers in Christendom, see Moore (1987).

<sup>7</sup> See Wormald (1984). For Susan Reynolds, the Anglo-Saxon, like the Frankish, Lombard and other 'barbarian' kingdoms of this period, as communities of law, descent and custom, attached to the ruling house, should be termed *regna* and their collective sentiments *regnal*, by way of a medieval analogy to modern nations; see Reynolds (1984, ch.8).

<sup>8</sup> For the rise of Tudor 'sacral kingship', see Guy (2002); On the cultural and religious regulation of English society under the Tudors, see Corrigan and Sayer (1985, chs.2-3, esp.56-62). On the cultivation of the imagery of the Virgin Queen, see Greenfeld (1992, 63-66). For Protestantism and its increasing association with English national identity and monarchy, see Loades (1982). How far John Foxe's celebrated *Book of Martyrs*, with its strong international emphasis, contributed to a heightened sense of national election, is disputed; perhaps to *an* elect, but not *the* elect nation. See on this Loades (1982); Kumar (2003, 112).

<sup>9</sup> For this definition of 'nationalism', see A.D.Smith (1991, ch.4); also Connor (1994, ch.4). Akenson (1992) gives a fascinating account of the biblical covenantalism of the Afrikaners, the Ulster-Scots and the Zionist Jews of Israel. For the English case, see Fletcher (1982), for Dutch Calvinism, see Schama (1987, ch.2). On chosen peoples in general, see A.D.Smith (2003, chs.3-5).

<sup>10</sup> On the Scottish Church and the covenanting tradition, see Williamson (1979). For a penetrating study of the attitudes to Europe and the European idea among contemporary Scottish elites, see Ichijo (2004).

<sup>11</sup> Schama (1987, ch.2) gives a wealth of examples of the use of the Old Testament concept of chosenness in the seventeenth-century Netherlands. For an interesting attempt, also buttressed with detailed historical materials, to use the Dutch case to undermine the 'modernist' paradigm of nations and nationalism, see Gorski (2000).

<sup>12</sup> On the medieval French monarchy and its Christian and national character, see Strayer (1971, ch.19) and especially Beaune (1985). For a critical analysis of the received tradition of French history, see Citron (1988); and for the French 'civic' concept of the nation, see Brubaker (1992).

<sup>13</sup> Bidault was here referring to the sixteen European recipients of the Marshall Plan. For Jean Monnet's conception of Europe, with its roots in Colbert, see Bell (1997, 110-18). On the French pursuit of *grandeur*, see Gildea (1994, ch.3).

<sup>14</sup> Bell (1997, 99-101) treats the same speech as an example of British approval of Franco-German cooperation in a

revived Europe.

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