Eric V. Snow HST 823 Dr. LoRomer December 13, 1993 Nationalism--final draft

THE ROLE OF CHRISTIANITY IN CREATING AMERICAN AND BRITISH NATIONALISM

"Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord, the people he chosen for

his inheritance" (Ps. 33:12). Over the centuries, most people derived their

primary sense of identity from either their religion,   what family they
                of,
were a member, or the village they lived in. However, a relatively recent rival

to these sources of personal identification has arisen over the past two or three

centuries: The nation that people consider themselves being a member of.

Loyalty to one's nation may be considered as co-existing in a hierarchy of

priorities ("For God and country") with other sources of individual identity

a member of a larger collective may chose to identify with. In the case of

Britain, religion played a significant role in the creation of its nationalism,

while in the United States it was more significant in creating its specific

content, such as its sense of mission to change the world. Below it shall

be shown how Christianity helped to create a sense of national identity among

the average people of Britain and the United States, and what content it gave

to their forms of nationalism.

Focusing on religion as a source of nationalism contains a number of

theoretical issues that need to be considered before examing the specific cases

of Britain and the United States. A "nation" constitutes a notoriously slippery

concept to pin down by a simple objective definition. The problem here is

that the unifying characteristic(s) used by nations historically can vary

enormously from case to case. Language, race, ethnicity, religion, literature,

political ideology, and a common government all have been used as the unifier

for a group of people living in a certain georgraphic area. None of these

objective criteria can be found in all cases of a "nation" existing. Yet, on

the other hand, a totally subjective definition for a "nation" is mistaken,

for it is manifestly easier to create nationalism among a group that has more of

these objective criteria in common among (say) 90% or more of its people. Even

advocates of purely subjective definitions of a nation such as Otto Bauer

and Ernest Renan (who once said a nation is a daily plebiscite) are said by

Hobsbawm that they "knew perfectly well that nations also had objective

elements in common."[1] The problem is that the objective criteria keep

changing from place to place, or differing minorities in a given geographic

area prevent unanimity from existing. The position of Welsh speakers in Britain,

of Bretons in France, or Jews anywhere in the ∧ Diaspora all constitute examples

of the extant minorities that prevent the easy unanimity nationalists normally

seek while they create a nation, or, in Benedict Anderson's phrase, an imagined

community[2]. A nation here will be defined as a community of people in a geo-

graphic area with one or more characteristics predominantly in common who

desire to have their own independent state.

This paper will focus generally on the point of transition from stage B

to stage C in Miroslav Hroch's schema of the spread and development of national-

ism as described by Hobsbawm.[3] Stage A exists at the beginning, in which there

are no political implications to a given group's cultural, linguistic, or reli-

gious commonalities. Stage B exists when a group of intellectuals, politicians,

or other theorists conceive of and agitate for aparticular concept of a nation.

Stage C exists when the masses--peasants, workers, servants, etc.--believe that

they are part of a given nation, not just an educated elite. For Britain,

it will be maintained stage C is reached early in the eighteenth century, but

that British nationalism's separate antecedents in England, Scotland, and Wales

go back a further century more in the past, to Elizabeth I's reign. For the

United States, Stage C is reached quite suddenly during the first half of

the American Revolutionary War (1775-79). However, much like Britain's three

component nations, American nationalism was built upon and later in reaction to

[1]Eric J. Hobsbawm, Nations and Nationalism since 1780 Programme, Myth, Reality
(Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1990), p. 8.

[2]Benedict Anderson, Imagined Communities Reflections on the Origin and Spread
of Nationalism (London: Verso, 1991), p. 6-7.

[3]Hobsbawm, Nations and Nationalism, p. 12.

prior loyalties as being loyal to England or Britain. It must be emphasized that American patriotism did not have to start from scratch in that the idea of nationalism already existed among the majority of people in the colonies at the end of the French and Indian War. Instead, the American revolutionists merely needed to change its direction of loyalty from the United Kingdom and its monarch towards America and its republic.

In the many attempts to create an "objective" definition of what constitutes or creates a nation, religion has played a significant role.[4] But because of the evident pluralism that exists in most modern nations' territories, it can be practically difficult to use a particular religion to glue the people together under one government into one nation-state. Since it involves people's personal ideas about the transcendent, religion, when used as a common denominator to unify an area's inhabitants, can be seen as particularly hazardous to such a set of people's religious liberty. Today, the era when kings could choose what the religious beliefs of their inhabitants would be, which was a problem that sprang from the Reformation in Germany, is long gone. People like to think the era of coercion in liberty of conscience is long over-- although the state of affairs in Bosnia belies this. Moderns are acutely aware of those of different persuasions getting left out, excluded, even oppressed when national identity is based upon religious identity.

Nevertheless, due to the traditional numerical predominance of a given religion, is not some aspect of being French, Spanish, or Italian tied to Roman Cahtolicism, of being English, Anglican, even (more hazardously) American or German being generically Christian? Whether it be emperor Constantine of the Roman Empire or Mohammed Ali Jinnah of Pakistan, historically have been frequently made attempts to gain political unity have been based on fostering a particular religion, or to use an already existing religion as a justification for creating a nation-state. Even in the contemporary case of Quebecois nationalism, the religious difference with much of the rest of Canada (the Francophone's Roman Catholicism as opposed to (nor-

[4]See Hobsbawm, Nations and Nationalism, p. 67-73.

...ily) Anglophone Protestantism) plays a role, even if the language difference is primary. In addition, the universal religions, such as Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, etc. can be hazardous building materials for nationalism since they make truth claims that transcend all time and space, not to mention international borders. The Neo-Guelphs attempt to build Italian nationalism around the Papacy failed, for "the Holy Church could hardly be expected to turn itself into a localized national, let alone nationalist, establishment, least of all under Pius IX."[5] Nevertheless, even with the hazards of creating left-out minorities and the West's increasing secularization, states past and present have used religion as a building block for creating national identity and/or state loyalty.

When and where did nationalism on the popular level first arise? A typical viewpoint is that of Elie Kedourie: "Nationalism is a doctrine invented in Europe at the beginning of the nineteenth century."[6] Benedict Anderson said that: "I will be trying to argue that the creation of these artefacts (i.e. "nations") towards the end of the eighteenth century . . ."[7] But is this the case? Can we see the idea of a nation, specifically one born out of a common religion, earlier than this very late date?

One radical, but highly plausible, proposal, lie in how the religion of Judeaism created the national of Israel and a sense of national identity among Israelites. A key component of their identity was how their laws and customs, as inspired by Jehovah, were to be a light to the world. We find Moses saying in Deuteronomy 4:5-8, 34:

See, I have taught you decrees and laws as the Lord my God commanded me, so that you may follow them in the land you are entering to take possession of it. Observe them carefully, for this will show your wisdom and understanding to the nations (i.e. gentiles), who will hear about all these decrees and say, 'Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.' What other nation is so great as to have their gods near them the way the Lord our God is near us whenever we pray to him? And what other nation is so great as to have such righteous decrees and laws as this body of laws I am setting before you today? . . . Has any god ever tried to take for himself one nation out of another nation (i.e. Egypt), but testings, by miraculous signs and wonders, by war, by a mighty hand and an

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5Hobsbawm, <u>Nations and Nationalism</u>, p. 72-73.

6Elie Kedourie, <u>Nationalism</u> (New York: Frederik A prager, 1961), p. 9 as

outstretched arm, or by great and awesome deeds, like all the things the Lord your God did for you in Egypt before your very eyes?

The significance for this idea is especially evident when the New England Puritans adapted this idea of being a chosen nation with a special mission given to it by God to their own situation in the New World. Despite the immense time gap between Old Testament Judaism and Puritan New England, the commonality of the idea in question is evident, even if it ceased having an ethnic application (as per Gal. 3:28-29; Col. 3:11-12; Rom. 3:29-30). For Protestantism saw itself as a rejection of Catholicism's syncretistic tendencies in absorbing Roman and Germanic paganism while engaging in a search for Christianity's roots in Judaism: "The Reformation, on other other hand, commonly understood itself to be a reassertion of Judaic themes. Primary in this effort, strongest in the Reformed or "Calvinistic" tradition, was a revival of the notion of the Christian church as a community called out from the world, an Elect Nation, a Holy People."[8] Here, the idea of the New Testament Church (not a given ethnic group) as "the Israel of God" (Galatians 6:16) and as "a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God" (I Pet. 2:9) gets self-applied to a group of Calvinistic Christian settlers in New England. Later, as the idea of being God's Israel, God's chosen nation gets separated from having a personal commitment to Christianity, and increasingly de-Christianized and transformed, America developed in its sense of mission the view that it had a special comission from God to spread its ideals of democracy and freedom to all the world. On a personal moral level, even in the 1950's Edward Burns was willing to assert about America:

> No truth is more patent in American history than the fact that this nation is an Old Testament people. Our attitudes toward thrift and success in business, toward Sabbath observance, toward crime and punishment, and toward the taboos of sex morality give convincing evidence of this. The explanation is to be found, no doubt, in the vigor and pervasiveness of Calvinist influence.[9]

Hence, the influence of Old Testament ideals on America's culture should not be underestimated--including on its particular sense of nationalism.

quoted in Sydney E. Alstrom, "Religion, Revolution and the Rise of Modern Nationalism: Reflections on the American Experience," Church History, December 1975, p. 496.

[7]Anderson, Imagined Communities, p. 4.

[8]Alstrom, "Religion, Revolution and the Rise of Modern Nationalism," p. 498.

5

As for the Israelites themselves, their religion created a sense of difference, and indeed even nationalism, despite all of their lapses into pagan idolatry from the ways of Yahweh throughout their history. Seeing themselves as having a common ethnicity (from Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob) and religion, there existed some of the useful common characteristics for making a nationalism. Indeed, J.J. Finkelstein credited the ancient Israelites with inventing the idea of a nation based upon them becoming a chosen people through the promise Jehovah made to them (Ex. 19:6: "You shall be unto me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation"). He said this promise

> set off chain reactions that with ever increasing, one may even say devastating effect have continued down to our own time. It embodies the earliest formulation of what we know more familiarly as "nationalism," i.e. the conscious elevation of the community to the level of a transcendent moral entity and the vessel for the progressive realization of human history, which, by the very same token becomes "sacred history" (i.e. significant in linear time--EVS)[10]

For an early example of such nationalism among the Israelites, the prophet Jonah was very unhappy when Yahweh chose not to destroy Nineveh, the capital of Israel's national enemy, Assyria, after it had repented: "When God saw what they (the Ninevites) did and how they turned from their evil ways, he had compassion and did not bring upon them the destruction he had threatened. But Jonah was greatly displeased and became angry (Jonah 3:10-4:1). As Jacques Grand'Maison pointed out about this passage:

> Le livre de Jonas pose le problème du nationalisme et de la fraternité universelle de tous les hommes. . . . Jéroboam II avait réveillé le nationalisme d'Israel face à l'empire assyrien oppresseur. Deux patriotismes fanatiques se dressaient l'un contre l'autre. . . . Mais ce qui est insupportable pour le prophète, c'est le projet divin de sauver les paiens, les autres nations, en bloc. . . . L'intention biblique est clair. L'intolérance nationaliste d'Israel est non seulement ridicule, mais infidèle au Dieu d'Abraham.[11]

Hence, the force of nationalism, including its negative effects, is found even in the Old Testament.

[9] Edward McNall Burns, The American Idea of Mission Concepts of National Purpose and Destiny (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1957), p. 11.

[10] J.J. Finkelstein, "The Goring Ox: Some Historical Perspectives on Deodands, Forfeitures, Wrongful Death, and the Western Notion of Sovereignty," Temple

6

Now the latter claim would be seen as the sheerest flight of fantasy by those historians who posit the creation of nationalism in the late eighteenth or early nineteenth centuries. As Hobsbawm asserts:

> Again, while the Jews, scattered throughout the world for some millennia, never ceased to identify themselves, wherever they were, as members of a special people quite distinct from the various brands of non-believers among whom they lived, at no stage, at least since the return from the Babylonian captivity, does this seem to have implied a serious desire for a Jewish political state, let alone a territorial state, until a Jewish nationalism was invented at the very end of the nineteenth century by analogy with the newfangled western nationalism.[12]

However, this viewpoint ignores the clear nationalistic nature of the Jewish revolts against Roman rule in 66-70 A.D. and 132-135 A.D., as well as perhaps those lead by the Maccabees against the coercive Hellenizing efforts of Antiochus IV Epiphanes of the Seleucid empire in 167-164 B.C. As one reads through the New Testament, one sees the twelve disciples and others had enormous difficulties in giving up the idea that the kingdom of God to be set up by the Messiah was immediate earthly political rule, in which the Jews got their change to lord it over the Romans (see Acts 1:6; Luke 19:11; 17:20-21; John 6:15; Mark 9:12; Matt. 17:11). ". . . (H)is disciples mistakenly limited Messiah's kingly rule to earth and specifically to fleshly Israel, even doing so on the day of the resurrected Jesus' ascension (Acts 1:6) . . ."[13] The Zealots, one of the factions that led the revolt against the Romans in the 66-70 A.D. period, have been described thus:

> A Zealot was a member of a fanatical Jewish sect that militantly opposed the Roman domination of Palestine during the first century A.D. When the Jews rebelled against the Romans and tried to gain their independence, a group of the most fervent Jewish nationalists called themselves "Zealots." . . . Like the Pharisees, The Zealots were devoted to the Jewish law and religion. But unlike most Pharisees, they thought it was treason against God to pay tribute to the Roman emperor, since God alone was Israel's king. They were willing to fight to the death for Jewish independence. . . . Their increasing fanaticism was one factor that provoke the Roman-Jewish war. . . . The last stronghold of the Zealots, the fortress of Masada, fell to the Romans in A.D. 73.[14]

Law Quarterly, Winter 1973, p. 253 as quoted by Ahlstrom, "Religion," p. 497.

[11] Jacques Grand'Maison, Nationalisme et Religion Tome II Religion et Idéologies Politiques (Montréal: Librairie Beauchemin Limitée, 1970), p. 16.

[12] Hobsbawm, Nations and Nationalism, p. 47.

7

...ence, this ancient Jewish faction d̶ ̶H̶ ...st emphasize a religious difference

with the Romans, but went one step...   ...g it to justify full political

independence from the Empire's rule.   ...us identity was the source

of what may have been the world's fir...   this factor gives even

greater cause for us to see how it play...   ...ing the earliest

modern nationalisms, those of the United   The ideal

of the nation-state is far older than what   ... today.

    Now Christianity is the common religious   . Why should

there be a focus upon just British and American n...   ...nfluenced by

Christianity when this influence will exist in Franc... ...any, Spain, Italy,

Russia, etc.? After all, all of these nations had cultural access to the

ancient Jewish national conception through the Bible. $\overset{Now}{\wedge}$ exactly _how_ a specific

group of human beings comes to identify itself as different from other groups,

and then as seeing this difference as entitling it to its own state and politi-

cal independence, has been one of the enduring problems within the historio-

graphy on nationalism. Below, we will be investigating various possible

means by which _religion_ may have played in creating a sense of nationalism

among people. Now what makes Britain, and its cultural offspring, the United

States, stand out is how their Protestantism allowed them to have among

the world's earliest nationalisms. In both cases, but especially the American,

they were heavily influenced by a specific type of Protestantism--Calvinism--

that strongly emphasized Christians are a called out, spiritually regenerated

elect who constitute a spiritual (not fleshy) Israel in God's sight. Such an

emphasis did not exist among Roman Catholics, and it was considerably weaker

in the Lutheran form of Protestantism. Hence, nations with these types of

Christianity in them aren't as likely to develop an early nationalism. For

the Calvinistic emphasis on the church as constituting God's chosen people

was grafted upon the nations where many of them were Calvinists, such as

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[13] _Aid to Bible Understanding_ (New York: Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society of Pennsylvania, 1971), p. 1003.

[14] emphasis in original, Herbert Lockyer, Sr. general editor, _Nelson's Illustrated Bible Dictionary_ (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1986), p. 1115. The works of Josephus (A.D. 37-100?) would be of great value to anyone wishing to research this issue further.

8

Scotland, England (to a degree), but especially colonial America.

In addition, a sense of unity can be created in one group in almost any situation by having (hostile) contact with "the other," i.e. against some other group. "All these (movements) underlined the differences between 'us' and 'them.' And there is no more effective way of bonding together the disparate sections of restless peoples than to united them against outsiders."[15] And here England's Protestantism, whether Anglican or non-conformist, played a crucial role in creating its nationalism. Whether it being the events surrounding the Spanish Armada of 1588[16] or the long series of wars with France from 1689 to 1815, the British were constantly comparing their religion with the Catholicism of their national enemies. "Britons defined themselves in terms of their common Protestantism as contrasted with the Catholicism of Continental Europe. . . . The absolute centrality of Protestantism to the British experience in the 1700s and long after is so obvious that is has often been passed over. . . . But they (the differences between various types of British Protestants) should not obscure what remained the towering feature in the religious landscape, the gulf between Protestant and Catholic."[17] Lest we forget, one of the principal reasons Charles I lost his head was over his policies favoring Catholicism abroad, and a high church Anglicanism that looked to many Puritans like a creeping Catholicism. James II, a forthight Catholic, was chased off his throne for similar reasons. Hence, the importance of Protestantism to the English self-identity is evident.

Due to the creation of a separate national English church by the Act of Supremacy (1534), and doctrinal changes occurring within it after the break with Rome, English (and Welsh) Anglicanism became distinctively different from Catholicism. With this change of religion affecting the English and Welsh masses, a very important condition for mass nationalism had been created,

[15]Hobsbawm, Nations and Nationalism, p. 91.

[16]No doubt the story of how Protestant England under Queen Elizabeth I fought off successfully the (Catholic) Spanish Armada of 1588 and the effects this had popular opinion is one reason why Hobsbawm was willing to make the following

requiring only wars with hostile Catholic powers (Spain, then France) to activate because of the fears of religious persecution that would occur if these powers successfully invaded Britain. Alas!--one of the unintended, unanticipated consequences of Henry VIII's desire to divorce Catherine of Aragon and to marry Anne Boleyn in order to have a male heir may have been the birth of modern nationalism! In addition, the ministry of John Knox from 1559 onwards transformed Scotland from a Catholic to a Calvinist nation, making possible a common British identity based on a generic Protestantism after the Act of Union (1707) among all three British nations.

One practical consequence of England's (now) different religion that routinely reached into the lives of the common people was how the Anglican church calendar became very different from that of Catholic Europe, with the latter's innumerable feast days honoring various saints. "The Elizabethan prayer book recognized 27 holy days (besides Sundays), compared to 125 before the Reformation."[17] In addition, starting with the encouragement of prayer and celebration on Novemeber 17, the day Elizabeth acceded to the throne, England (and Wales) began to create a series of national holidays that honored events in the lives of its monarchs, or which commemorated some event of significant historic interest to the nation as a whole. These days had no counterparts in continental Europe or in England's earlier reigns. They were observed by ringing church bells, holding special services, feasting, drinking, and other festive cermonies like bonfires. Days for ringing church bells, etc. were later added for James I's accession, birthday, and coronation, for Charles II's restoration, commemorating the Gowrie conspiracy, and--one that is still with us--Gunpowder Treason Day.[18] Notice how in particular the last of these days calls direct attetnion to the Protestant-Catholic contro-versy, since it was a group of disloyal Catholic Englishmen lead by Guy Fawkes concession against his late eighteenth century paradigm for the birth of modern nationalism: "Nevertheless, in one way or another membership of a historic (or actual) state present or past, can act directly upon the consciousness of the common people to produce proto-nationalism--or perhaps even, as in the case of Tudor England, something close of modern patriotism" (Hobsbawm, Nations and Nationalism, p. 75).

10

who sought to blow up the Houses of Parliament. As Linda Colley pointed

out: "Every November 5, until 1859, worshipers at virtually all Protestant

places of worship in England and Wales would be reminded that it had been

a Catholic who had tried to blow up James I and Parliament back in 1605."[19]

The calendar served as an "annual mnemonic or perpetual reminder" which

"touched popular consciousness" through "almanacs and sermons, precepts,

proclamations, and unwritten instructions."[20] Hence, the new Protestant

Calendar served as a device to help build loyalty not only towards the

monarch, but towards fellow Protestant Englishmen and women, i.e. the

nation itself, not just its ruler.

Looking for a stage "B" (i.e. of intellectual agitators of nationalism)

in the history of English nationalism is inevitably tricky, but two sixteenth

century names that stand out are John Bale and John Foxe. Bale's History

of King Johan and Chronycle Concernynge . . . syr John Oldcastell and Foxe's

Book of Martyrs (London, 1563) served to promote English nationalism, especi-

ally in a Protestant form.

> By 1555 Bale and his friend John Foxe had made considerable progress
> in constructing a distinctively English historiography of the reform-
> ation, in which the persecution then raging featured as a trial of
> God's Elect, and the English protestants in general as a 'godly rem-
> nant' of the true church.[21]

However, they did not see England as an especially elect nation, since

they included their fellow believing Protestants in Switzerland and Germany

as part of God's elect, as per the universalism of Protestant Christian

theology.[22] A major part of the transition from stage B to stage C can be

found in the popularity of Elizabeth I, much of which extended from her

upholding the cause of Protestantism as against "the other" of the con-

[17] David Cressy, "The Protestant Calendar and the Vocabulary of Celebration in Early Modern England," Journal of British Studies, January 1990, p. 34.

[18] Ibid., p. 35,-36.

[19] Linda Colley, "Britishness and Otherness: An Argument," Journal of British Studies, October, 1992, p. 317.

[20] Cressy, "Protestant Calendar," p. 37, 38-39.

[21] David Loades, "The Origins of English Protestant Nationalism," in Stuart Mews, ed., Religion and National Identity (Oxford, England: Ecclesiastical History Society, 1982), p. 303.

tinent's Roman Catholicism. Lord Chancellor Hatton at the opening of Parliament in 1589 attacked the Spaniards as "insatiable tyrants," and then said:

> (T)hey never bent themselves with such might and resolution against the very Turk or any other infidel and they have done against a virgin queen, a famous lady and a country which embraceth without corruption to doctrine the true and since religion of Christ (i.e. Protestantism).[23]

In a book describing Wales during the period from 1660-1730, G.H. Jenkins and others have described (that) Welsh language ballads and almanacs were 'shot' through with the most vigorious anti-Roman animus!"[24] All of this anti-Catholicism contributed to the idea England was, at some level, a chosen nation:

> Especially after the accession of Queen Elizabeth, militant Protestants of Reformed and Puritan persuasion came increasingly to see England itself as the elect nation. This belief that England was chosen for a special role became even stronger during the days of Cromwell.[25]

The English statesman Edmund Burke some two centuries later felt the British people had a special mission entrusted to them from God:

> True nationalist that he was--nationalist of the heroic age-- Burke felt that here lay the kernel of the British people's mission on earth. A year before his death he spoke to his friend, French Laurence, of his lifelong "defienace of the judgments of those who consider the dominion of this glorious empire, given by an incomprehensible dispensation of the Divine Providence into our hands, as nothing more than an opportunity of gratifying, for the lowest of their passions. . . . "[26]

Hence, British Protestantism, both through conflict with the "other" of Roman Catholicism and by imparting some of the idea that Brtain was God's chosen people, helped create British nationalism.

> By the time of the Armada it was possible to assume (although not with complete accuracy) that protestantism and patriotism were the same thing--but that had required in the meantime a lot of work, and the benign face of fortune--or providence.[27]

[22]Loades, "Origins," p. 303 and Anthony Fletcher, "The First Century of English Protestantism and the Growth of National Identity," p. 309 in Mews, ed., Religion and National Identity.

[23]Fletcher, "The First Century," Mews, ed., Religion and National Identity, p. 311.

[24]Colley, "Britishness," p. 318.

[25]Ahlstrom, "Religion", p. 498.

[26]Salo Wittmayer Baron, Modern Nationalism and Religion (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1947), p. 31.

[27]Loades, "Origins," in Mews, ed., Religion and National Identity, p. 307.

12

Increasingly perceived as harboring pro-Catholic sentiments, the monarchy

under the Stuarts was increasingly <u>attacked</u> by this British Protestantism.

Nationalism no longer had to be seen as focusing loyalty towards the ^crown above

all. Charles I and Archbishiop William Laud found thenselves more and more

at odds with the Puritans and other dissenters, as they moved the Church of

England towards arminianism in theology. "Anti-Catholic bonfires were

distasteful to a Catholic queen and to a government building good relations

with the Catholic powers. The popular practice of noisemaking and burning

of popish effigies (on Guy Fawkes day) incurred official displeasure."[28]

Charles I ordered in 1630 Bells to be rung and bonfires lit on his birthday,

November 17, two days after the <u>spontaneous</u> celebrations of November 17,

the anniversary of Queens Elizabeth's day of accession.[29] This illustrated

how no prompting by the monarchy "was necessary to secure ample ringing on

the anniversaries of Protestant deliverances."[30] Anthony Fletcher summarized

the Puritans' turn of opinion thus:

> In June 1621 the commons had engaged in a display of protestant
> nationalism on the basis of sympathy and accord with the crown. In
> June 1628 it was apparent that the gentry's nationalist fervour was
> being turned, by theskilful leadership of a group of determined men,
> against the crown and its closest advisers. This is a turning point
> in seventeenth century English history that has not yet received the
> stress it deserves.[31]

Hence, while Elizabeth I's reign strongly helped to solidify the connection

of Protestantism with being English (and even Scottish), this dual identity

became increasingly autonomous from royal control, and was turned against Charles

I and James II later with spectacular results.

During the eighteenth century, and clearly solidified by the end of

Napoleonic Wars in 1815, British nationalism, as opposed to English, Scottish,

or Welsh nationalism, was a demonstrable popular force. The earlier mentioned

[28]Cressy, "The Protestant Calendar," p. 43.

[29]Ibid., p. 46.

[30]Ibid.

[31]Fletcher, "First Century," in Mews, ed., <u>Religion and National Identity</u>, p. 315.

anti-Catholic work of John Foxe, its full name being <u>The Book of Martyrs:</u> <u>Containing an Account of the Sufferings and Death of the Protestants in the</u> <u>Reign of Queen Mary the First</u>, originally published in 1563, was massively popularized in the eighteenth century by being sold in installments so average people could afford to buy it. This work which William Haller in his <u>The Elect Nation: The Meaning and Relevance of Foxe's "Book of Martyrs"</u> (1693) interpreted ‸as promoting the idea of England as a chosen nation, would
(erroneously, it appears)
surely intensify popular British Protestant nationalism.[32] The persecution of Protestants by Catholics in Germany, Spain, and Hungarywas "extensively reported in British Newspapers and constantly referred to in sermons."[33]
nationalism
By this means, British Protestant ‸could seep even more thoroughly into the British masses.

The fear of invasion by a Catholic power with a Catholic occupying army in support of a restored Catholic monarchy sank deeply into the minds of many in Britain. In 1708, 1715 and 1745 serious attempts to overthrown the Protestant monarchy and replace it with the Stuarts were made. "The prospect of all this, though it never came to pass in fact, made the sufferings of other European Protestants seem frighteningly revelant. . . . (A)ll these horrors (that Protestant refugees were suffering--EVS), argued a dissenting minister in 1735, were a poignant reminder of Britain's own blessings and a warning of how easily they could be snuffed out."[34] The danger of invasion by France was also partciularly actue during 1778-80 and 1797-1805, creating occasional panics among the <u>average</u> people in the countryside:

> The poet John Clare, son of a poor laborer from Northamptonshire, noted how his fellow villagers were gripped by invasion fears in 1803, in part because they retained a strong oral tradition of earlier incursions. They had gathered "at their doors in the

[32]Colley, "Britishness," p. 319.

[33]Ibid., p. 320.

[34]Ibid., p. 320-321.

evening to talk over the rebellion of '45 when the rebels reached Derby and even listened at intervals to fancy they heard the French 'rebels' at Northampton knocking it down with their cannon."[35]

Even the likes of E.P. Thompson concedes:

> In the next few years (after 1797), when a French invasion was possible, there is no doubt that the patriotic sentiments of the populace threatened the surviving Jacobins with mob terrorism. . . . The invasion scare resulted in a torrent of broadsheets and ballads on such (patriotic) themes (about English liberty), which form a fitting background for Wordsworth's smug and sonorous patriotic sonnets . . .[36]

Hence, it is quite clear the masses in Britain were patriotic by the period of the Napoleonic Wars, having once again to face the Catholic "other."

The role of religion in creating American patriotism is also of great importance, although by the time of the revolutionary war political issues must be seen as predominant as creating and sustaining it, such as the desire for freedom, liberty, individual rights, equality, independence, etc. Thomas Paine's pamphlet <u>Common Sense</u> was a political tract making use of popularized Lockean arguments, while only briefly touching on religious issues, and then only as seen in a political light. (For example, his use of I Samuel against the divine right of kings). This pamphlet sold some 120,000 copies, and was read by an estimated 1,000,000 Americans by the time independence was declared, which is a truly remarkable saturation level in a population of approximately 3,000,000 (which includes children, slaves, etc.) Nevertheless, Christianity played a key role in determining much of the content and thrust of American nationalism. The key concept here that was imparted to America's culture was Calvinism's belief in Christians being a called out, chosen people, who, once they settled in America, were seen as leading all the world to righteousness. The Puritan governor John Winthrop said in the period of the founding of the Bay State colony in 1630 that "this commonwealth was to become a very <u>Model of Christian Charity</u>." Winthrop also said

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[35] Colley, "Britishness," p. 323.

[36] Edward P. Thompson, <u>The Making of the English Working Class</u> (New York: Vintage Books, 1966), p. 77, 79.

> For the worke we have in hand, it is by a mutuall consent through a
> special overruling providence, and a more than ordinary approba-
> tion of the Churches of Christ (that?) seek out a place of Cohabita-
> tion and Consortshipp under a due forme of Government both civill
> and eccelsiasticall.

He also made the famous statement that, "Wee must Consider that wee shall be a City upon a Hill, the eyes of all people are upon us." William Stoughton in 1668 included in his call for revival: "This we must know, that the Lord's promises and expectations of great things, have singled out New England, and all sorts and ranks of men among us, above any nation or people in the world."[37] Edward Johnson, in Wonder Working Providence of Zion's Saviour (1650) saw New England as "where the Lord would create a new heaven and a new earth, new churches and a new commonwealth together."[38] Even in Virginia one could find this notion of a chosen people, for many Puritans settled there as well. Alexander Whitaker said in Good News from Virginia that: "(T)he finger of God hath been the only true worker here; that God first showed us the place, God called us hither, and here God by His special Providence hath maintained us."[39] Hence, the New England Puritans felt themselves to be opening a new chapter in history, that what they were establishing would change the world.

There are several reasons why the "chosen nation" concept sank so much more deeply into the (eventual) American consciousness than the British consciousness. One was that the Puritans, with their emphasis on the Old Testament, composed only a small (albiet influential) minority of Britain's people, while in America "dissenters," Puritans, etc. overwhelmingly outnumbered Anglicans in all the colonies. Burke estimated Anglicans only compsed a tent of the Colonies' population.[40] Even in supposedly "Cavalier Virginia," Thomas Jefferson estimated three-fourths of the population was dissenting Protestant at the time of the Revolution.[41] Even many in the Anglican church there were Puritans or sympathetic to Puritanism—at least half by one estimate.[42] Second, since the Puritan settlers felt they were in a new land, the idea of it being

[37] As quoted in Ahlstrom, "Religion, Revolution and the Rise of Modern Nationalism," p. 499.

[38] As quoted in Dorothy Dohen, Nationalism and American Catholicism (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1967), p. 17.

16

specially reserved for them to make a fresh start for all of humanity to

follow their example was easy for them to accept. By contrast, living in a

long settled land like Britain, with churches, castles, and cities hundreds

of years old, it would be significantly harder for the Puritan imagination to

conjure up the image of their being a pioneers for a totally new way of life

all should (and will) follow. (As the case of Cromwell shows, they could

hurtle over this barrier as well, but their revolution did not stick). Third,

since Puritans or dissenters were greatly predominant type of settlers, they

would naturally project their version of the "English" identity upon their

communities, instead of what the average (Anglican) English person would have

identified with, whether lord, gentry, or laborer. As Professor Louis Hartz

of Harvard stated in 1968:

> The matter of the nationalist reponse goes back, in fact, to the moment of
> the migration itself. For when the English Puritan comes to America,
> he is no longer completely "English," which means that he has to find
> a new national identity. And where is that identity to come from if
> not from Puritanism itself, the ideal part which he has extracted from
> the English whole and which alone he possesses. Hence the part becomes,
> as it were, a new whole and Puritanism itself blossoms into "American-
> ism."[43]

Hence, the idea of being a chosen nation with a special role to play in God's

sight sank much deeper in the American imagination than the British due to

America having a far greater percentage of Puritans and dissenters.

Now, the Puritan ideal of mission was increasingly de-Christianized, even

secularized in the decades to comes, in the same manner Benjamin Franklin

secularized the Puritan work ethic. Yet, even the like of Thomas Paine said

the Reformation preceded the discovery of America so that God could provide

a place of safety for the persecuted in later years, "when home (Europe) should

afford neither friendship nor safety." John Adams said in 1765 that he consi-

[39] As quoted in Benjamin Hart, Faith & Freedom The Christian Roots of American
Liberty (San Bernardino, Calif.: Here's Life Publishers, 1988), p. 150.

[40] Baron, Modern Nationalism, p. 34.

[41] Hart, Faith & Freedom, p. 151.

[42] Ibid.

[43]
   as quoted in Robert S. Alley, So Help Me God Religion and the Presidency,
Wilson to Nixon (Richmond, Virginia: John Knox Press, 1972), p. 32.

dered always the colonizing of America "with reverence and wonder, as the opening of a grand scheme and design in Providence for the illumination of the ignorant, and the emancipation of the slavish part of mankind all over the earth."[44]   After the cooling off of the Great Awakening of the 1730's-40's and the pre-occupation of New England with Britain's wars against France in the New World, New England clergy began to replace spiritual goals of righteousness with political ones of freedom.   Jonathan Mayhew in 1754 reflected the new myth by saying: "Our ancestors, tho' not perfect and infallible in all respects, were a religious, brave and vertuous set of men, whose love of liberty, civil and religious, brought them from their native land, into the American deserts."[45]   There occurred a grafting of whig conceptions of politics onto the collective identity of New England.   The colonists, who very strongly considered themselves to be Englishmen and women and not as "American" as of yet, strongly identified with the freedom and rights given by the English constitution.   "The civil and religious liberty (not spiritual righteousness--EVS) of British Protestants became the divine standard against the anti-Christian foe of French popery and slavery."[46]

In addition, the fear of the designs of the French settlers in New France also served as a "Other" of Catholicism for New Englanders to mobilize against, much as Britain mobilized against France proper.   Indeed, the New England clergy constantly idealized British liberty in the 1740's and 1750's, included Britons among God's chosen people, and saw all of Britain's past evils as historically attributable to France and Catholicism.[47]

However, suddenly with the events of the Stamp Act, a proposal to impose bishops on Puritan churches in America, and (somewhat later) what the colonists perceived as the pro-Catholic Quebec Act, this sense of British nationalism was gradually transmuted into American nationalism.   The harsh rhetoric used formerly against the French as deniers of liberty now gets turned against the British home government.   Being obsessed with the subject of civil oppression in the

[44]Burns, The American Idea of Mission, p. 11.
[45]Nathan O. Hatch, "The Origins of Civil Millennialism in America: New England

18

colonies, they blasted Britain with all the apocalytic rhetoric they could

command. For example, Samuel Sherwood in a sermon to a Connecticut audience

in early 1776 said:

> God Almighty,with all the powers of heaven,are on our side. Great
> numbers of angles, no doubt, are encamping round our coast, for our
> defence and protection. Michael stands ready, with all the artillery
> of heaven, to encounter the dragon, and vanquish this black host.[48]

Combined with the secular efforts and agitation of men such as Thomas Jefferson, Thomas

Paine, and Benjamin Franklin, it did not take long for American nationalism

to arise out of the ashes of their former loyalties to Britain.

One final consideration of the harnessing of religion to nationalism

is the dangerous, heady sense of pride that can result from believing your

nation has God on its side. The danger is that such a nation's leaders and/or

people may come to think they can do no wrong. For example, the earlier

New England Puritan minister Thomas Shepard said that,"during the Pequod

War, 'the Providence of God' guided three for four hundreds of the Indians

to a place convenience for 'the divine slaughter by the hand of the English.'

Some were put to the sword and some were burned to death when their wiwams

were set afire, 'until the Lord had utterly consumed the whole company . . .'"[49]

Using terminology developed by the theologian Paul Tillich, one needs the

"prophetic critique" of the "myth of origin" to prevent the idea of being God's

chosen people from running away in a nation. One can say just as well that

being a chosen nation involves special responsibilities and burdens. Ancient

Israel was hauled off into exile for its idolatry in the Old Testament by the

Babylonians and the Assyrians. Hence, being a chosen nation is not necessarily

all its cracked up to be--assuming it is true!

We have traced above the role of religion in creating nationalism in the

United States and Britain, with particular emphasis on the role Puritan Protes-

tanism has played by contributing the idea of the people of a particular church

Clergymen, War with France, and the Revolution," William and Mary Quarterly,
July 1974, p. 424.

[46]Ibid., p. 424-425.

[47]Ibid., p. 426.

[48]Ibid., p. 407.

19

constituting God's chosen people. For the supreme irony behind how this concept of being God's chosen people has played out in the successors of those early Puritans is that a spiritual nation--the church--ends up being equated with a fleshy nation and its state, which was what the New Testament was supposed to abolish, at least concerning spiritual salvation: "Here there is no Greek or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all. Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience" (Col. 3:11-12). Unless humanity learns some of these kinds of spiritual lessons--of having diversity in peace--and gives up the idea God is automatically on the side of your nation in war, the future of humanity with an unbridled nationalism would seem very bleak indeed.

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[49] Dohen, Nationalism and American Catholicism, p. 18.

[50] See Raymond F. Bulman, "'Myth of Origin,' Civil Religion and Presidential Politics," Journal of Church and State, Summer 1991.