War, Imperial Expansion and Religious Developments in Mid-Eighteenth-Century Britain and Ireland*

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This article offers a fresh look at the relationship between war, imperial expansion (itself a consequence of war) and religious developments in Britain and Ireland in the middle decades of the eighteenth century. While conflict between Britain and the Catholic Bourbon powers between 1739 and 1763 heightened popular hostility to ‘popery’ among Protestants, war and the expansion of empire helped to change elite attitudes towards Catholicism. Catholic rehabilitation, though long-drawn-out and limited in this period, had the effect of dividing Protestants, deepening the mutual suspicions and mistrust between Protestant Dissenters and the Anglican establishment in England, Wales and Ireland.

It scarcely seems an exaggeration to say that the recent historiography of eighteenth-century Britain has been dominated by war, empire and religion. John Brewer can be seen as the principal pioneer of a growing literature on the impact of war on state and society;¹ P.J. Marshall and Kathleen Wilson, from very different perspectives, have obliged us to address the domestic dimensions of empire;² and since

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the publication of J.C.D. Clark’s controversial work on the foundations of political culture, even non-specialists have been unable to ignore the importance of religion.³

While it would be wrong to say that these three themes have been studied in isolation from each other, they have not been connected as thoroughly as they might have been. Linda Colley has looked at all three, but more in relation to the development of a sense of Britishness – her central concern – than in relation to each other.⁴ Colley’s work has been immensely influential, but also much criticized. Her vision of a common Protestantism binding Britons together has come under particular attack, both from those who point to the significant differences between Scottish Presbyterianism and English Anglicanism,⁵ and from those who stress the divisions between English and Welsh Dissenters and the Anglican establishment.⁶ Colley, it should be added, quite deliberately excludes Ireland from her analysis, on the grounds that the Irish could never subscribe to a British identity;⁷ yet Britain’s international conflicts and acquisition of new overseas territories had significant implications for the legal status of Ireland’s Catholics and their relationship with the British state. The time would seem ripe, then, for a further look at the relationship between war, imperial expansion and religion.

This article explores that relationship in the mid-eighteenth century, a period of near continuous armed conflict. War with Spain from 1739 merged into war with France, officially in 1744, but in practice much earlier. This contest, known in Europe as the War of the Austrian Succession, formally ended with the peace of Aix-la-Chapelle of 1748, but hostilities between the British and the French continued beyond Europe almost unabated. In 1755 a British army was routed in the

³ J.C.D. Clark, English Society, 1688–1832: Ideology, Social Structure and Political Practice during the Ancien Régime (Cambridge, 1985). Clark followed this up with The Language of Liberty, 1660–1832: Political Discourse and Social Dynamics in the Anglo-American World (Cambridge, 1994). There was, of course, a great deal of fine work on religious themes undertaken before Clark’s call to arms, but much of it was underused by non-specialists.


⁷ Colley, Britons, p. 8.
Ohio valley in North America, and the following year war was officially renewed in Europe itself. This conflict, subsequently called the Seven Years War, was to last until the peace of Paris of 1763. These armed struggles were intimately connected with religion and they had significant effects, directly or indirectly, upon religious divisions and religious attitudes in Britain and Ireland. Victory in the second of the great mid-century wars brought considerable expansion of the British empire. The annexation in North America of French Canada and the great wilderness from the Appalachian mountains to the Mississippi was to have particularly important religious consequences in the British Isles.

During this period, the Church of England was dominant in England and Wales. Public office-holding at local and national levels was confined by law to Anglican communicants, but this religious restriction at least had the virtue of excluding only relatively small numbers, as Anglicans formed the great majority of the population. There was a small residual Catholic presence, mainly in the remoter parts of the northern counties and in Monmouthshire, and Protestant dissent was not yet anything like the force it was to become in the next century, and was even somewhat weaker than it had been in earlier decades. The Church of Scotland had been Presbyterian in structure since 1690, and the Episcopalians, who had previously been the establishment, now counted as Dissenters. Also in the dissenting ranks were the various Presbyterian groups that had broken away from the Scottish kirk, mainly over the issue of patronage. Catholicism was largely confined to the highlands, though even there it was a minority taste: traditionalist Episcopalianism was much stronger. The Irish religious dispensation was superficially similar to England’s in that the established church was Anglican and office-holding was, in theory, monopolized by its members. In sharp contrast to England, however, the Irish church commanded the adherence of only a small proportion of the population in its charge. Even among Protestants, the Anglicans were outnumbered in Ulster, especially eastern Ulster, where Presbyterians of Scottish descent were in a majority. Catholics, who formed the overwhelming bulk of the Irish people in every province except Ulster, were formally excluded from political participation, for the most part squeezed out of landownership and forbidden (in theory at least) even to practise their religion without molestation. Similar restrictions operated for Catholics in England, Wales and Scotland, as in the aftermath of the ‘Glorious Revolution’ of 1688–90 there had been much nervousness among British and Irish Protestants about the continuing loyalty of Catholics to the deposed Stuart dynasty.

The first part of this article looks at how the wars of the mid-eighteenth century, involving hostilities with France and Spain, the great Catholic powers, intensified an existing disposition towards crude and vociferous anti-Catholicism on the part of many British and Irish Protestants. Common hostility to Catholicism, as Colley argued, enabled Protestant solidarity – despite tensions – to be the order of
the day, especially during the Forty-five Jacobite rebellion, when the restoration of the Catholic Stuarts seemed a real possibility. In the second section, however, we see that the British state’s need for ever-greater quantities of military manpower led to a softening in official (and more broadly in elite) attitudes towards Catholicism that began during the Seven Years War. The fevered anti-papery rhetoric of the Forty-five rebellion years had become more muted by 1763 – at least among leading British politicians. Nor was this just a temporary change induced by wartime pressures. There could be no easy return to pre-war mentalities, because the decision to keep conquered Canada, with its significant Catholic population, obliged the British governing classes to rethink the status (and threat) of Catholicism in the home territories. The politico-religious landscape had changed in other respects. In the 20 years after Prince Charles’s defeat at Culloden in April 1746, the Jacobite challenge to the Hanoverian monarchy and the Whig regime appeared steadily less credible. So long as Catholicism continued to be associated with France, and French-style ‘despotism’, anti-Catholicism remained a potent force; but fear of Catholicism as an immediate and persistent menace, aided and abetted by a domestic ‘fifth column’, was tempered by the effective decline of the Stuart alternative to the Hanoverians. The third and final section explores these same themes from a different angle. The falling away of Jacobitism, Catholic military service and the expansion of the empire also played their part in weakening Protestant unity. The post-Seven Years War period was to see renewed assaults by Protestant Dissenters on the special position of the established churches throughout the three kingdoms, especially in England and Wales.

I

‘I trust my God will hear ye Prayrs of his Praying People’, the elderly Sarah Savage wrote during the War of the Austrian Succession, ‘and not suffer Popish Enemyes to prevail over us’. In an age when Christianity still provided most of the British and Irish people with their route-map through life, God’s controlling hand was seen in every event. War, like harvest failure, or cattle plague, or earthquakes, was commonly seen as a divine visitation. It was natural, therefore, for wars to inspire appeals to the Almighty for protection, deliverance and forgiveness, as well as thanks for victories on the battlefield. Such appeals and thanks were perhaps all the more heartfelt on the part of British and Irish Protestants in wars against France and Spain, the great Catholic powers of Europe, because so much appeared to be at stake. While in England it was quite possible for Catholic families to be

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8 Dr Williams’s Library, London, MS 90.2, Sarah Savage’s Journal, 24 Sept. 1745.
reasonably well integrated into predominantly Protestant communities. Catholicism was far from accepted. Indeed, fear and loathing of Catholicism was deeply imbedded in Protestant culture. Every 5 November, Protestants celebrated the foiling of the Catholic plot to kill the King and destroy the English Parliament in 1605. ‘Queen Mary’s burning zeal’ and ‘the Massacre in Ireland’ in 1641 were advanced, together with the Gunpowder plot, as incontrovertible evidence of the determination of Catholicism, given the opportunity, to ‘extirpate’ Protestantism. And ‘Popery’, regarded with suspicion and hostility even in peacetime, became still more hated during conflicts with the great Catholic powers.

Here we should also note that the mid-century wars coincided with a period of evangelical revivals on both sides of the Atlantic. From the 1720s Britain and its colonies in North America – from newly founded Georgia in the south to the New England provinces in the north – were affected by waves of evangelical enthusiasm among different Protestant denominations. Evangelicalism was at least partly based on fear of a resurgent Catholic threat, with the effect that it boosted anti-Catholicism and at the same time was itself boosted by wars against Catholic states. Hugh Davies, a young Welsh follower of the evangelical Howell Harris, was sufficiently inspired by religious zeal to join the army in 1758 to fight the French. Writing (in Welsh) to Harris from newly conquered Quebec in October 1759, Davies referred to ‘something within us longing to give a blow to Popery’.

When conflict with Spain began in 1739, the Catholicism of the enemy was soon emphasized; a poem penned by Benjamin Coles, and addressed to an army officer, appealed to God to defend the subject of the verse against the popish Spaniards, and offered encouragement to all Britons that they were fighting for their church as well as their king and country. The situation in the War of the Austrian Succession, it must be said, was somewhat complicated by the alliance with

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the Catholic Habsburgs. The apparent naturalness of the relationship with Maria Theresa – Sir Robert Walpole told the British House of Commons in April 1741 that Austria and Britain were ‘equally endangered by the French greatness, and equally animated against it by hereditary animosities’\textsuperscript{16} – would seem to suggest that anti-Catholicism was very much subordinate to other considerations. But it would be unwise to assume that the Austrian alliance significantly softened hostility to ‘popery’. The parliamentary opposition in Britain pointed to the incongruity of fighting ‘for Roman Catholicks and against Roman Catholicks’,\textsuperscript{17} and some of the British troops dispatched to the Austrian Netherlands in 1742 seem to have caused considerable offence by behaving disrespectfully towards Catholic priests and disrupting Catholic ceremonies.\textsuperscript{18} The extent of the awkwardness caused by such a close connection with a Catholic power was perhaps fully revealed only in 1756, when Frederick of Prussia replaced the Austrians as the chief ally of Britain; from that point, government-supporting pamphleteers were able to trumpet the naturalness of the relationship with a Protestant state – a message that clearly struck a chord with many Protestants at home.\textsuperscript{19}

Hostility to Catholics was based not simply on a distinctly Protestant reading of history, but also on a calculation of current danger. In Ireland, Protestants were particularly fearful that an enemy landing would spark off a great Catholic uprising. Should the Jacobite rebels continue to be successful in Britain, an Anglican bishop wrote from Dublin in November 1745, ‘the Papists here would rise in all parts except the Northern Counties’.\textsuperscript{20} The sense of relief when the Duke of Cumberland finally defeated the Jacobites was almost palpable; it was not surprising, perhaps, that Sir Lawrence Parsons and other Anglican landowners in King’s County paid for a 50 foot high pillar with a statue of the duke on top – ‘the first public Monument of Gratitude upon that glorious Occasion in the three Kingdoms’.\textsuperscript{21} At the beginning of

\textsuperscript{16} W. Cobbett and J. Wright, eds, \textit{Parliamentary History of England [PH]} (36 vols, London, 1806–20) xii, p. 169. The Earl of Stair, soon to command the British forces sent to the Low Countries, argued in June 1741 that the alliance was appropriate because Austria was the weakest power in Europe, and offered no competition on the seas or as a trading rival: \textit{Annals and Correspondence of the Viscount and the First and Second Earls of Stair}, ed. J.M. Graham (2 vols, Edinburgh and London, 1875) II, p. 278.

\textsuperscript{17} [Anon.,] \textit{The Freeborn Englishman’s Unmask’d Battery, or, A Short Narrative of our Miserable Condition} (London, 1747), p. 20.


\textsuperscript{20} Derbyshire Record Office [RO], Wilmot Horton of Catton Collection, D 3155, WH 3433.

\textsuperscript{21} \textit{Faulkener’s Dublin Journal}, 9–13 Sept. 1746.
the next war, the Lord Lieutenant of Ireland was convinced that Catholic disaffection required only foreign military intervention to turn into a general insurrection that could sweep away the Protestants. He strongly disapproved of any Catholic recruitment in the regiments in his jurisdiction, arguing that ‘was an Enemy to land in Ireland they [the Catholic soldiers] would undoubtedly join them’.  

In Britain, where we know that Catholics formed a tiny minority, it might be expected that such fears would not have existed. But at the time, knowledge of the true number of Catholics was very imprecise, and in an atmosphere of uncertainty, grossly exaggerated accounts of Catholic strength fed anxieties about a bloody uprising. ‘If France and Spain knew the state of Popery in England’, a Somerset clergyman wrote in October 1739, ‘I am confident they would venture 1000 men if they could upon our English Shore and would quickly have 10 000 to joyn them’.  

In February 1744, when a French invasion was expected, anonymous intelligence passed on to the Duke of Newcastle expressed the view that ‘half London are perverted & turnd Papists’. At the end of the next year, London was said to have been ‘several times’ alarmed that the ‘Roman Catholicks would rise’; most Protestants, according to this account, had ‘furnished themselves with Arms’, and ‘a strong guard’ was out every night to ensure that everything remained quiet.  

In 1756 Lord Tyr awly was again warning that ‘The many Thousands of Roman Catholicks, that are in London’ needed to be watched very carefully.  

Unsurprisingly, fear of Catholicism was at its height at the time of the Forty-five rebellion. The forces of Prince Charles, the son of the Stuart claimant, not only defeated the government’s troops in Scotland, but marched as far south as Derby and threatened London. The panic caused by the rapid advance of the Jacobite army was widespread. The Revd William Stukeley, living at Stamford, Lincolnshire, through which it was rumoured that the Pretender’s troops might pass on the way to London, wrote in his diary that ‘Spalding, Wisbech, Peterborough, Oundle, and all the country round’ were ‘in the utmost fright, hiding and carrying off their goods’.  

Fear was fuelled not just by reports of ravaging highlanders, but by the general conviction that Protestantism itself would be in jeopardy if the ‘Popish Pretender’ succeeded. The Forty-five, as Colin Haydon has demonstrated so clearly,  

22 Derbyshire RO, Wilmot Horton of Catton Collection, D 3155, WH 3450.  
23 The Correspondence of Bishop Secker, ed. A.P. Jenkins, Oxfordshire Record Society L.X.II (Stroud, 1991), p. 46.  
24 British Library [BL], Newcastle papers, Add. MS 32702, fol. 46.  
25 Leicestershire RO, Herrick papers, DG.9/2476.  
26 BL, Leeds papers, Egerton MS 3444, fol. 67.  
28 See, e.g., Thomas Amory, The Prayer of King Jehoshaphat Considered, and Applied to the State of the Nation: In a Sermon Preached at Taunton, December 18, 1745. On Occasion of the Public Fast (London, 1745), esp. pp. 13–14, 27. This sermon, and many other contemporary publications, made clear that it was not just Protestantism in Britain
brought forth a great wave of anti-Catholic hysteria. In January 1746 Gertrude Savile was noting in her diary that Catholic ‘Mass Houses’ were being attacked ‘in several places’; while she was worried about the consequences of such independent action by ‘The Mob’, she still thought it ‘Shamefull’ that any places of Catholic worship were allowed to exist at all. The government, keen to inspire the people to resist the Pretender’s forces, had contributed to this feverish atmosphere by encouraging the public to see Prince Charles as an agent of both France and the Pope. But encouragement was not much needed. In early October 1745 Arthur Jessop, a Yorkshire apothecary, heard a sermon preached by his local Presbyterian minister in which ‘he showed that Popery was directly against liberty in all cases, [and] gave reasons why we should make a vigorous stand against popery and Slavery, and for liberty’. An opposition newspaper said much the same at the beginning of the following month: ‘Wherever Popery is predominant, it is destructive of the religious and civil Liberties of Mankind.’ A still more lurid picture was painted by pamphlets of the time. If a Catholic prince took the throne, one anonymous author wrote, ‘The Spirit of his Government would soon be seen in Imprisonments, Massacres, and all kinds of Tortures!’ ‘In short,’ the diatribe continues, ‘Popery is a bloody, an inhuman Institution, and is of the Devil, who was a Murderer from the Beginning’.

With fear of Catholicism reaching fever pitch, the differences between various types of Protestants could be laid aside in the interests of Protestant solidarity. This is not to say that Protestant unity was the invariable rule: far from it. The Scottish Episcopalians were recognized to be largely Jacobite in sentiment; as they pinned their hopes for the restoration of their church to its former established status on the

that was in danger, but Protestantism throughout Europe.

29 Haydon, Anti-Catholicism, pp. 130–63.
33 Anon., An Earnest Address to Britons. Wherein the Several Artifices Made Use of by the Emissaries of France and Rome, to Corrupt the Minds of the People, and to Overturn our Happy Constitution, are Explained, and Laid Open to Public View. Recommended to the Perusal of All who Prefer Liberty to Slavery, Christianity to Popery, Property to being Dragooned, and Riches to Wooden Shoes (London, [1745]), pp. 5, 12. See also, for a rehearsal of all the old arguments against the Catholics, D. Gittins, A Short View of Some of the Principles and Practices of the Church of Rome: Being the Substance of a Sermon Preached on Occasion of the Late General Fast, December 18, at the Churches of Southstoke and Arundel (London, 1746).
34 See Nottingham University Library, Newcastle of Clumber MSS, NeC 85/4, where Episcopalian meeting houses are described as ‘Nurseries for young Traytors, and rendezvous’s for old ones’.

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success of the Stuarts, the Episcopalians were very unlikely to be attracted by calls to make common cause with the Presbyterian Church of Scotland that they sought to supplant. The willingness of Irish Dissenters to sign up to an anti-Catholic crusade was also questioned in some quarters: resentment at their formal exclusion from public office by the Irish Test Act of 1704 was reported to have led them to argue ‘that they are no way obliged to venture their Lives in Defence of a Place, where they are treated with no greater respect than Papists’. And there were some churchmen in England who looked with suspicion on Protestant Dissenters at this juncture, recalling, perhaps, James II’s attempts to drive a wedge between Protestants by offering concessions to Dissenters to promote an anti-Anglican alliance of Catholics and Protestant Nonconformists. The Dissenters in Northamptonshire, according to Philip Doddridge, were ‘insulted by their enemies here as if the Presbyterians were for bringing in the Chevalier’. Richard Kay commented similarly on tensions in Lancashire in the aftermath of Cumberland’s victory at Culloden: high Anglicans, whom Kay seemed to equate with ‘Jacobites, alias Papists’, attacked the ‘low Church or Presbyterians very much’. The Methodists, who regarded themselves at this stage as still part of the Anglican Church, were also criticized as unreliable: Newcastle was presented with a report from Newark that accused the Methodists of being ‘secret Friends of ye Pretender’.

The rabidly anti-Catholic pamphleteer quoted earlier recognized the difficulties involved in creating Protestant unity, and tried hard to promote it by blaming all divisions on the ‘artful Nonjuror’ and the ‘subtle Papist’ who sought to ‘disunite Protestants’. Our security, he told his readers, lay ‘in our Union, as Protestants, regarding our Interests as one and the same; it being certain, that a Change of Government will equally affect us, of the Establishment, as those who are Protestant Dissenters of every Denomination’.

That he had to make such efforts might tell us something about the fragility of Protestant unity in England; but we should not forget that many Dissenters did respond favourably. Even the Quakers, despite their pacifist doctrines, were reported to have provided the army with clothing and to have wished success to

36 BL, Newcastle papers, Add. MS 32702, fol. 153.
39 BL, Newcastle papers, Add. MS 32702, fol. 81. For earlier suggestions that the Methodists were connected with Catholicism, see British Museum, Department of Prints and Drawings [BM] 2425, Enthusiasm Delineated, and BM 2432, Enthusiasm Display’d, both 1739. See also D. Butler, Methodists and Papists: John Wesley and the Catholic Church in the Eighteenth Century (London, 1995), esp. ch. 3.
40 Anon., An Earnest Address to Britons, pp. 1, 21.
Cumberland; and Protestant Dissenters were as enthusiastic in their celebrations after his triumph at Culloden as any Anglican: the Independent Church in Bedford, for instance, offered praise and thanksgiving at the end of April 1746 for ‘the complete victory over the rebels’. In Scotland, the Presbyterian Seceders from the established kirk, who had offered a radical critique of the Union based on seventeenth-century Covenanting principles – the need for a Presbyterian system of church government throughout the three kingdoms – proved as keen as the Church of Scotland to see off the Jacobite threat. The Seceders of Galloway, Nithsdale and Annandale sent a loyal address to the king in November 1745, offering to raise their own regiment for ‘the preservation of the Covenanted Reformation, their Country & liberties, as well as the defence of Your Majestie, as their Lawfull Sovereign’. In Ireland, as in the other two kingdoms, denominational tensions within Protestantism could not be brushed under the carpet, and the Dublin Parliament felt it necessary to declare that ‘any person who shall commence a prosecution against any dissenter who has accepted, or shall accept of a commission in the array or militia’ – which was technically a breach of the Test Act of 1704 – ‘is an enemy to King George and the protestant interest, and a friend to the Pretender’. Yet the very fact that the Anglican-dominated Irish Parliament was able to agree (without opposition) such a resolution, and another that praised Dissenters who were serving as militia officers for their timely loyalty to the King and the ‘protestant interest of this kingdom’, suggests that Protestant unity was both obtainable and to a considerable degree achieved.

II

The defeat of Charles Edward, the Young Pretender, at Culloden can be seen, in retrospect, as the beginning of the end for Jacobitism. This was not necessarily apparent at the time; indeed, fears of a renewed insurrection in Scotland were voiced at various times during the rest of the Austrian war. In July 1746 the Marquess of Granby wrote that ‘untill a peace is concluded, France will no doubt try to keep up the Rebellion in the Highlands’; he was convinced, moreover, that this would be ‘no difficult matter . . . for the spirit of rebellion still prevails.

44 Nottingham University Library, Newcastle of Clumber MSS, NeC 1711/2.
45 Journals of the House of Commons of the Kingdom of Ireland (20 vols, Dublin, 1796–1800) vii, p. 650.
amongst the greatest part of the clans'. After the war was over, Jacobite plotting continued until at least 1753. The failure of the great French invasion plans of 1759, which, if successful, would have placed James Edward, the Old Pretender, on the thrones of the three kingdoms, was perhaps a more decisive moment, though even then the dashing of the French plans did not necessarily preclude a further attempt to install a Stuart claimant. George III’s succession in 1760 can be seen as another important development in the decline of Jacobitism, primarily because his keenness to end the war in Germany, and his assertion of his British credentials, made it more difficult for Jacobites to exploit popular anti-Hanoverian sentiment. The end effectively came, however, when Rome finally turned its back on the Stuarts. With the death of the Old Pretender in 1766, the Pope refused to recognize the Young Pretender as king. True, the language of Jacobitism – or rather, anti-Jacobitism – continued to be used long after the threat of a Stuart restoration had disappeared. It was given a boost when the Earl of Bute became first minister in 1762. Bute laboured under two major disadvantages: he was the first Scotsman to occupy a senior political post in London, and his family surname unfortunately happened to be Stuart. Bute’s continuing influence after he left office enabled accusations of behind-the-scenes Jacobitism to persist into the American crises of the 1760s and 1770s, but by this time Jacobitism was invoked metaphorically rather than literally: when supporters of a hard line towards the colonists were accused of ‘Jacobitism’, they were not – in most cases, at least – thought to be plotting the return of the Stuarts; they were being accused of favouring an authoritarian approach to government.

As hostility towards Catholicism in Britain and Ireland had been intimately connected with fear of domestic support for a Stuart restoration, the decline of Jacobitism to the point where it offered no serious challenge was perhaps bound to influence Protestant attitudes towards Catholics. Charles O’Conor, a Catholic landowner and scholar from

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48 For an instance of Jacobite propaganda from George II’s reign that played on anti-Hanoverian prejudice to make the Stuarts seem more acceptable, see [Anon.], A Dialogue between Thomas Jones, a Life-Guard-Man, and John Smith, Late a Serjeant in the First Regiment of Foot-Guards, Just Returned from Flanders (London, 1749), p. 22.

49 As the Duke of Devonshire commented in Oct. 1762, Bute ‘has his Birth per Contra’: BL, Holland House papers, Add. MS 51382, fol. 137.

50 For an example of anti-authoritarian imagery that uses the language of Jacobitism, see R.C. Simmons and P.D.G. Thomas, eds, Proceedings and Debates of the British Parliament Respecting North America, 1754–1783 (6 vols to date, Millward, NY, 1982–) v, p. 169. See also BM 4140, The Repeal, or, The Funeral of Miss Amé Stamp, 1766, a cartoon that associates the Stamp Act with Jacobitism and authoritarian measures such as ship money and general warrants.
County Roscommon, argued along these lines as early as 1755, maintaining that as the Protestant succession was now secure, Protestants had nothing to fear from their Catholic neighbours.\footnote{See J. Smyth, The Making of the United Kingdom, 1660–1800 (London, 2001), p. 187.} Joseph Priestley, an English Dissenter, said much the same a few years later. In 1768 his Essay on the First Principles of Government maintained that as ‘the pope himself has refused to acknowledge the heir of the Stuart family to be king of England’, there was no longer any Catholic threat to guard against.\footnote{Joseph Priestley: Political Writings, ed. P.N. Miller (Cambridge, 1993), p. 62.}

Another influence, at least on elite thinking, was the need to tap Catholic manpower for the armed forces. There was no formal ban on Irish Catholic recruitment into the navy, and no one seems to have seriously questioned the appropriateness of this source of naval ratings, probably because the navy was seen as no real threat to liberty – on the contrary, as it served on the seas beyond the three kingdoms, and was the first line of defence against invasion, the navy was widely viewed as the bulwark of British freedom. The army, however, was another matter. Given its potential as a coercive force within the home territories, its composition was an issue of some sensitivity. In the Austrian succession struggle, Catholic recruits were regarded as inappropriate, and every effort was made to root them out.\footnote{See, e.g., Derbyshire RO, Wilmot Horton of Catton Collection, D 1355, C 507 and C 697.} The Earl of Chesterfield, lord lieutenant during the Forty-five, tried to persuade Irish Protestants that they had little to fear from their Catholic fellow-countrymen, though with little success.\footnote{See, e.g., J. Ainsworth, ed., The Inchiquin Manuscripts (Dublin, 1961), p. 160. The contrast between Chesterfield’s attitude towards the Scots and the Irish is brought out in B. Lenman, ‘Scotland and Ireland, 1742–1789’, in J. Black, ed., British Politics and Society from Walpole to Pitt, 1742–1789 (London, 1990), pp. 86–7; and S.J. Connolly, ‘Varieties of Britishness: Ireland, Scotland and Wales in the Hanoverian State’, in Grant and Stringer, Uniting the Kingdom?, pp. 193–4.} But in the next conflict, the demand for still greater numbers of soldiers meant that a more pragmatic approach was adopted. While there continued to be considerable opposition to the employment of Irish Catholics in regiments that remained in Ireland, the presence of Catholics in corps serving overseas was tolerated by the British and Irish governments. As Sir Robert Wilmot, secretary to the lord lieutenant, commented in January 1757, ‘a Few Papists may not be so bad Consequence in North America as the want of Numbers’.\footnote{See Derbyshire RO, Wilmot Horton of Catton Collection, D 1355, C 1966.} Wilmot, furthermore, understated the extent of connivance at Catholic recruitment. A year earlier, Lord Loudoun, then the commander-in-chief of the British army in North America, complained of the ‘great numbers of the Irish’ in his regiments. Not all of these men would have been Catholics, but Loudoun pointed out that many of the Irish had deserted to the French, whose forces included a battalion of the Irish Brigade, a unit likely to have been
attractive to Catholics.\textsuperscript{56} Returns for the British troops in America in the summer of 1757 suggest that 27.5\% of the rank and file were Irish.\textsuperscript{57} Again, it must be stressed that not all of these Irish soldiers were Catholics, but we can be confident that a significant proportion was.

Some Catholic leaders, seeing an opportunity to demonstrate their reliability, actively sought to encourage recruitment. In 1762, for instance, the Catholic peers Lords Kenmare and Kingsland suggested to the Irish Parliament that a ‘Roman Legion’ of seven regiments of Irish Catholics might be recruited for service in the Portuguese campaign, where British forces were supporting the Catholic king of Portugal against an invasion by the Catholic Spanish. Even before formal hostilities opened, Charles O’Conor was advocating scrupulous loyalty by Catholics as the way to secure, in the long run, repeal of anti-Catholic penal laws, and in 1759 the Catholic Association was founded with this objective. O’Conor was accordingly delighted with the impeccably loyal sentiments expressed by the Catholic clergy at the time of the brief and insubstantial French descent on Carrickfergus in 1760, and he followed with interest the progress of the ‘Roman Legion’.\textsuperscript{58} Despite the efforts of the Catholic gentry and merchant leaders, there were to be no significant concessions to Catholics until the Europeanization of the American war in 1778, which both posed another Bourbon threat to Ireland and necessitated a further great expansion of the armed forces to fight a global conflict; and even then, many Protestant Irishmen remained deeply suspicious of Catholic motives and reluctant to approve any relaxation of the penal laws.\textsuperscript{59} None the less, the start made in mobilizing Irish Catholic manpower in the Seven Years War can be seen to have prepared the ground for later measures of Catholic relief, and the conspicuous loyalty of the Irish Catholic elite during that struggle helped to soften attitudes towards Catholicism in British governing circles.

Shifts in attitude conditioned by the strains and demands of war could easily have been subject to regression once those strains and demands subsided. But any reversion to a less sympathetic line was made less likely by the outcome of the Seven Years War. The importance of the acquisition of Grenada, in the West Indies, might be noted in this regard, for on Grenada the French planters were not only allowed to keep their property and practise their religion, they were also permitted to vote in the new assembly established when the island became a British colony. But British governments managed to separate the issue of the governance of Grenada from the wider matter of the


\textsuperscript{58} The Letters of Charles O’Conor of Belanagare, ed. C.C. Ward and R.E. Ward (2 vols., Ann Arbor, MI, 1980) i, pp. 10, 80, 89, 135 & n.

treatment of Catholics throughout the King’s dominions, largely, one suspects, because the French Catholic population on the island was so small. The same could not be said for Canada, and its conquest in 1760, and the decision to retain it at the peace, had profound consequences for Catholics in Britain and Ireland.\textsuperscript{60} While the movement to Canada of Anglophone Protestants was encouraged as the necessary precondition for the establishment of representative institutions on the model of the older British colonies, settlement incentives should be seen alongside the toleration offered to the existing Catholic inhabitants, whom the British authorities wanted to persuade not to abandon the new colony. In December 1761 the Earl of Egremont, the secretary of state responsible for the colonies, informed General Amherst, the commander-in-chief of the army in North America, of the King’s wish that the French Canadians ‘be humanely & kindly treated’ and that no insult be offered to them on the basis of ‘the Errors of that mistaken Religion, which They unhappily profess’.\textsuperscript{61} However much this attitude might have been influenced by the short-term desire to avoid a crisis of depopulation in the aftermath of the British conquest, it was to have longer-term implications. As the anticipated tide of Anglophone settlers failed to materialize, conciliation of the Catholic population continued to be necessary if Canada were to remain of any value to the British crown. The tolerant approach adopted in the years immediately following the surrender of New France therefore developed into the much fuller recognition of the position of the Catholic Church in the Quebec Act of 1774.\textsuperscript{62}

British and Irish Protestants, it should be said, were not lacking in experience of ruling foreign Catholics before 1760. Minorca’s Catholic population, under British jurisdiction since 1708, had already been offered similar latitude.\textsuperscript{63} But, as we have seen, numbers appear to have been crucial, and as the number of French Canadian Catholics far exceeded the number of Minorcans, the granting of liberal concessions to the Catholics of Canada had obvious repercussions for the treatment of Ireland’s Catholic majority.\textsuperscript{64} As with Irish Catholic military service, the benefits were not to be felt immediately, but the expansion of British dominion in Canada almost certainly influenced the


\textsuperscript{61} Public Record Office, Kew, Colonial Office papers, CO 5/214, pt ii, fol. 242.


gradual amelioration of the Catholic position in Ireland. The first sign of this development came with the passage through the Irish Parliament in 1772 of a modest reform of the landownership laws, allowing Catholics to take out reclamation leases for 61 years. Two years later an oath of allegiance for Catholics was approved, after a protracted period of negotiation in which the Anglican bishop of Derry acted as honest broker between the Catholic hierarchy and the Dublin government. The popularity of the new oath among the Catholic gentry and merchants made it more difficult for opponents of relief to sustain their claim that the Catholics were by nature disloyal to the Hanoverian regime, and so eased the way for the next (and more significant) round of concessions that began during the American war.

III

The Protestant front that largely bound together the established churches and Dissenters during the anti-Catholic Grande Peur of 1744–6 began to break down as soon as the fear of invasion and Jacobitism subsided. In January 1748, as the Austrian war entered its last months, George Stone, the Anglican archbishop of Armagh, was worried that any regulation of the Irish boroughs by the Dublin Parliament ran the risk of undermining the hold of the Church of Ireland and giving an opening to the Presbyterians in Ulster. Protestant unity was again the order of the day as tensions with France mounted in the early 1750s; reports in the periodical press of the persecution of French Protestants were likely to have reminded readers both of the dangers of a Catholic regime and of Britain’s role as the champion of the Protestant interest. A sense of solidarity with fellow Protestants was evident when invasion threatened in 1756, and it continued to operate in many quarters until the end of the Seven Years War. In the following decade, however, Protestant unity was much less apparent. Ulster Presbyterians engaged in protests against the tithe in the immediate aftermath of the conflict, while secessions from the Church of Scotland accelerated in the 1760s. Perhaps most conspicuously, the English Dissenters started to become strongly hostile to Lord North’s government in the early

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67 See esp. Gentleman’s Magazine, 1st ser., XXII (1752), pp. 386 and 538. The plight of the French Protestants was to be a recurring theme in later years: see, e.g., George Whitfield, A Short Address to Persons of All Denominations, Occasioned by the Alarm of an Intended Invasion (London, 1756), p. 17.
68 See, e.g., Whitfield, A Short Address; Richard Winter, The Importance and Necessity of His Majesty’s Declaration of War with France Considered and Improved, in a Sermon Preached, May 23, 1756, at the Meeting-House in Moorfields, and to the Congregation of Protestant Dissenters at Islington (London, 1756), p. iii.
70 See C.G. Brown, Religion and Society in Scotland since 1707 (Edinburgh, 1997), ch. 2.
1770s. The changed atmosphere can perhaps be illustrated by the activities of the Body of Protestant Dissenting Ministers of the Three Denominations (Presbyterians, Independents and Baptists) in and about the cities of London and Westminster. During the Austrian war this body of ministers had sent in loyal addresses to the crown, and in 1763 it showed a deferential desire to follow the lead of the clergy of the established church in congratulating the King on victory. Thereafter, however, it became very keen to promote relaxation of the requirement under the Toleration Act of 1689 that Dissenting ministers and schoolmasters subscribe to most of the Church of England’s Thirty-Nine Articles. Indeed, the ministers of the Three Denominations became so committed to this cause that they abandoned their deference to the established church and launched a fierce attack on the bishops who had blocked the relief bills of 1772 and 1773.

Protestant tensions had already been visible during the war. In the early stages of the fighting across the Atlantic, there was a great deal of discussion about the inability of the colonists to offer effective resistance to the French and their native allies (‘I am sorry to say they are very much disunited notwithstanding their common danger’). Some of the criticism centred on the reluctance of the colonial assemblies to respond to British control and direction, but where this resistance to central authority came from colonies with a strong Dissenting tradition, the religious as well as the political make-up of the provinces became a matter for comment. The obstructionism of the Quakers – who had been censured in the previous conflict for their refusal to allow militia legislation to pass through the colonial legislatures that they controlled – became a matter of considerable concern at the beginning of the Seven Years War. Condemnation of Pennsylvania’s Quaker elite, moreover, spilled over into public disapproval of Quakers in Britain. In January 1756 a ‘letter from Philadelphia’ in a London newspaper asked how long Pennsylvania would have to ‘groan under the government of a set of enthusiasts, who will not suffer us to put forth our strength, even when the sword is at our throats’. Shortly after-

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71 See, e.g., Dr Williams’s Library, Wodrow–Kenrick correspondence, MS 24.157 (48a) and (49).


73 William Salt Library, Stafford, Congreve papers, S.MS. 478C, Lt James Cuninghame to William Congreve, 6 Aug. 1754. Adams’s Weekly Courant, 17–24 June 1755, carried a piece noting the disparity between the large numbers of British subjects in North America compared with the population of the French colonies, implying that if the British colonies co-operated with each other, their numerical superiority would ensure victory.

wards, Quaker property was attacked in London when its owners failed to respond to the King’s proclamation for a day of prayer and fasting to secure divine sanction for the British cause. The war itself, then, did some damage to Protestant unity, even if in rhetorical terms it was portrayed, on both sides of the Atlantic, as a struggle against ‘Popery’ by a free Protestant people.

But more important in undermining Protestant solidarity were the very factors that helped to promote a gradual improvement in the position of Catholics in Britain and Ireland – the withering of the Jacobite threat, Catholic military service and the expansion of empire. So long as the threat of a Stuart restoration remained potent, Protestants of all denominations were inclined to stand together for fear of aiding a return of Catholicism. Protestant Dissenters were inhibited from launching a full-frontal assault on the defects of the established churches while there appeared to be a pressing danger to the continuation of an ecclesiastical dispensation that was at least reformed (even if imperfectly so) and offered them toleration (if not equality). In 1759 Richard Price, a Dissenting minister who was later to become a vocal critic of the existing dispensation in church and state, delivered a sermon, *Britain’s Happiness, and the Proper Improvement of It*, in which, while he hinted at his hostility to religious tests and subscriptions, the dominant theme was a celebration of the ‘religious liberty [that] is the crown of all our national advantages’. ‘All sects’, he went on, ‘enjoy the benefits of toleration, and may worship God in whatever way they think most acceptable to him’. And if Dissenters such as Price were restrained by fear of something worse, the established churches themselves were perhaps less inclined to look on Dissenters as dangerous subversives while their support in a common Protestant front was required. Once Jacobitism ceased to appear threatening, however, the fissiparous tendencies within Protestantism reasserted themselves. Priestley’s *Essay on the First Principles of Government* of 1768, as we have seen, argued that with the Pope’s turning his back on the Stuarts there was no longer any Catholic danger to worry Protestants. He proceeded, on this basis, to attack the privileged position of the Church of England and the restraints placed on Dissenters. While in 1759 Price had lauded the toleration available to all Protestants, in 1768, with the Jacobite

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76 For a good example of this, see Samuel Davies, *Religion and Patriotism, the Constituents of a Good Soldier: A Sermon Preached to Captain Overton’s Independent Company of Volunteers, Raised in Hanover County, Virginia, August 17, 1755* (Philadelphia and London, 1756), esp. pp. 19–20.


78 Clark, *English Society*, lays particular stress on the connection between the decline of Jacobitism and the militancy of Dissent – especially heterodox ‘Rational Dissenters’ such as Price and Priestley – from the 1760s.
alternative no longer a real threat, Priestley felt confident enough to move onto the offensive: ‘toleration in England’, he asserted, ‘notwithstanding our boasted liberty, is far from being complete’.  

Catholic military service exerted a more subtle influence. At first its divisive effect on Protestants was distinctly limited. Politicians and army commanders who recognized the utility of recruiting Catholics for service abroad were clearly out of line with the thinking of most Protestants, particularly in Ireland, who remained deeply suspicious of the Catholics and very doubtful of their loyalty. Chesterfield’s relaxed and easygoing attitude towards the Irish Catholics was far from typical even of the political elite; the Duke of Devonshire, lord lieutenant before Chesterfield, was much more in tune with the fears of Irish Protestants. When, in November 1739, Irish Catholics objected to a bill coming before the Dublin Parliament to disarm them, the Irish Commons addressed the Lord Lieutenant, asking him to press ahead. Devonshire responded the very next day, telling the anxious MPs that he would ‘at all times be ready to do every thing in my power’ to preserve the public peace, and to this end ‘a proclamation is already ordered, for disarming the Papists of this kingdom’.  

In 1741, when he was approached about the governorship of Galway, Devonshire made it plain that he regarded this not as a political sinecure but as a post for a military commander who would play his part in keeping the local Catholics in check. With the coming of the war against France, Devonshire further revealed his predilections by ordering an immediate crackdown on Catholics and the strict enforcement of all penal laws. His son, who became lord lieutenant in February 1755, just as the next round of conflict with France was about to begin, was no less robust in his hostility to Catholics. Allowing Catholics to carry arms was seen by both dukes of Devonshire – and the vast majority of Irish Protestants – as asking for trouble. In 1762 the projected ‘Roman Legion’, supported and sponsored by the Irish Catholic leadership and intended, as we have seen, to be used in the war in Portugal, was vetoed by a Dublin Parliament nervous at the thought of so many Catholics in the possession of firearms. But while Ireland’s Protestant elite was able to see off this particular enterprise, it could not stop increasing recruitment of Catholics by existing army regiments. The result was a growing suspicion among Irish Protestants that the British and Irish governments were all too willing to subordinate the interests of Ireland’s Protestants to Britain’s military and imperial requirements. This suspicion acquired the character of a conspiracy theory in the

79 Joseph Priestley, ed. Miller, pp. 68–9, 88.
80 Journals of the House of Commons of the Kingdom of Ireland vii, pp. 101, 104, 105.
81 West Sussex RO, Goodwood MSS, 110/125, Devonshire to [the Duke of Richmond], 24 Aug. 1741.
82 See Derbyshire RO, Wilmot Horton of Catton Collection, D 1355, WH 3450.
83 For an expression of Protestant anxiety, see [Anon.], Some Reasons against Raising an Army of Roman Catholicks in Ireland in a Letter to a Member of Parliament (Dublin, 1762).
American war, when Catholic troops were being recruited for service against fellow Protestants in the colonies;\textsuperscript{84} but even in the Seven Years War and its aftermath, the British state’s willingness to countenance the recruitment of Irish Catholics both reinforced Irish Protestant patriotism, with its ingrained hostility to British encroachments, and widened the rift between the visceral anti-Catholicism of the majority of Irish Protestants and the increasingly tolerant and pragmatic British Protestant political elite.

Imperial expansion affected Protestant unity in a variety of ways. The liberal treatment of Catholics in Canada (and to a lesser extent in Grenada) may well have encouraged Protestant Dissenters in England, Wales and Ireland, and Presbyterians in Scotland, and even Low Church Anglicans, to look suspiciously on the Anglican elites who presided over the new tolerance. Thomas Hollis, a prominent English Dissenter, led a campaign in sections of the press against the concessions to Catholicism in both Canada and Grenada, culminating in a long piece in the \textit{Political Register} in 1769 attacking successive governments for their seemingly pro-Catholic policies. A series of letters from ‘Pliny Junior’, published in the \textit{Public Advertiser} in 1769–70, pursued the same theme.\textsuperscript{85} We should be careful not to overstate the extent of criticism, however. There is no significant evidence of hostility towards the Anglican governing classes on this issue until the Quebec Bill debates of 1774.\textsuperscript{86} By this stage, the question of how Catholics were to be treated in Canada had become inextricably bound up with the treatment of the older, and overwhelmingly Protestant, British colonies in North America: there was much talk, on both sides of the Atlantic, of an authoritarian, even crypto-Catholic, plot to destroy Protestant liberties, and the use of ‘papists’ – both Irish and Canadian – as a military force to compel the American Protestants to obey Lord North’s government. But it should be stressed that such concerns were given full voice only in the fevered atmosphere in the year preceding the outbreak of open fighting between the British army and the New England colonists – a time when many people were particularly susceptible to the deceptive simplicity of conspiracy theories. Prior to this point, most British and Irish Protestants seem hardly to have noticed the concessions made to the Canadian Catholics; their attention, as we will see, was focused instead on the possibilities created by the expansion of the empire.


\textsuperscript{86} For a contemporary cartoon that links the Quebec Bill explicitly with the Anglican Church hierarchy, see BM 5228, \textit{The Mitred Minuet}. There was, of course, plenty of earlier general commentary on the affinities between High Churchmen and Catholics; see, e.g., \textit{The Diary of Sylas Neville, 1767–1788}, ed. B. Cozens-Hardy (Oxford, 1950), p. 107 (‘there is always a fraternal affection between Roman Catholics and High Church Tories’).

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Of more immediate importance in promoting Protestant disunity was the increased migration from Europe to North America that followed the conquest of Canada in 1760, and became even more apparent after the ending of the Seven Years War in 1763. About 137,000 white settlers arrived in the British North American colonies between 1760 and the outbreak of the War of Independence in 1775. English Anglicans would have constituted only a small minority of these incomers, for the total of English migrants was a mere 30,000. The largest ethnic group was the Irish (55,000), the vast majority of whom were Presbyterians from Ulster. Scottish migrants were the next most numerous (40,000), and while some of them would have been Episcopalian highlanders, they also included significant numbers of Presbyterians and a small quantity of Catholics. The 12,000 German arrivals were nearly all Protestants of one description or another, but most emphatically not Anglicans. A consequence of this surge of migration was an intensification of the tendency towards greater religious diversity that had been evident since the beginning of the eighteenth century. English America in 1650 had been overwhelmingly Puritan (or Congregationalist) in New England and largely Anglican in the Chesapeake colonies. A hundred years later, the picture was much more complicated. In New England, Congregationalism remained dominant, but Anglicanism was making some headway; in the middle colonies Presbyterians, Quakers, Dutch and German Reformed Churches, Anglicans, Lutherans and assorted German sects were to be found in competition with each other, while in the south Anglicanism was facing a serious challenge in the backcountry from various Dissenters, particularly the Baptists and Presbyterians (‘I cannot forbear expressing my concern to see Schism spreading itself through a colony which has been famous for uniformity of Religion’, an Anglican clergyman wrote of the situation in Virginia). It would be wrong, then, to overstate the importance of the migratory surge following the fall of New France; religious diversity had been becoming more marked for several decades before the Seven Years War even started. But there can surely be no doubt that the new arrivals, because they were largely non-Anglicans, increased the sense of a competition for souls between Anglicans and Dissenters throughout the British Atlantic world.

The Revd Henry Caner, a pugnacious Anglican clergyman tending a congregation in Boston, the citadel of New England Congregationalism, was characteristically explicit about the new atmosphere. In January 1763 he wrote to the archbishop of Canterbury of a ‘bitterness of spirit which seems thus of a sudden to break out among the Dissenters’. This he attributed to the ending of the war and the

88 W.S. Perry, ed., Historical Collections Relating to the American Colonial Church (5 vols., Hartford, CT, 1870–8) i, p. 366.
expansion of British dominion in North America, which opened up a new field of operations for the Church of England and the Dissenters. ‘Their activity’, Caner concluded, ‘is therefore employed to the utmost, both here and in England, to secure the Event in their favor’. What Caner omitted to say was that his efforts were similarly employed, and were also increasing the temperature; like many Anglican clergy-men on missions for the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel, Caner saw himself on the front line in a war against Dissent. It was at least partly in response to the perceived threat of Dissenting advance that the post-Seven Years War period saw another concerted effort to obtain government support for the appointment of Anglican bishops to serve in America. As a writer in favour of an American episcopacy argued in a letter published in a London newspaper, in some of the colonies ‘Quakerism, Independency, and Presbytery, have acquired as it were a National Establishment’; an Anglican episcopacy was therefore necessary to wean ‘those People from their pernicious and unreasonable Schism’. Again, it is important to stress that the idea was not new: American bishops had been suggested in the 1750s and earlier, but the creation of an American episcopacy became a major issue of concern after the Seven Years War. The project came to naught, largely because successive governments were reluctant to risk offending Dissenting opinion, but there was now lack of enthusiasm on the part of Archbishop Thomas Secker, who tried to persuade senior British politicians at various points in the 1760s.

Competition between Anglicans and Dissenters (and between different Dissenting denominations) was intensified after 1763 by the enticing prospect of converting the native population that resided in the great inland wilderness stretching from the Appalachian mountains to the Mississippi river. Even before the war had ended, the Revd Thomas Barton, an Anglican clergyman in Pennsylvania, was writing of ‘the happy period’ that had arrived with the extension ‘of our dominions far into America’, which had turned ‘many barbarous Nations who are immersed in the grossest Idolatry without even the knowledge of the

90 As did their supporters back in London: see John Egerton, bishop of Bangor, A Sermon Preached before the Incorporated Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts, at their Anniversary Meeting in the Parish Church of St. Mary-le-Bow, on Friday February 18, 1763 (London, 1763), p. 18.
God that made them’ into the king’s subjects. ‘I hope’, Barton concluded, ‘we shall seize so favourable an advantage to enlarge the dominion of Christ, by propagating his Gospel among those poor Heathen who “sit in darkness and the shadow of death”’. Back in London, Anglican clergymen similarly waxed lyrical about the delights of ‘bringing an ignorant savage race of people to the knowledge of truth’. The Presbyterians were no less impressed by the opportunities presented by the British triumph for converting the Native Americans. Pennsylvania’s Presbyterians dispatched preachers to the backcountry ‘to report how we may best promote the Kingdom of Christ among . . . the Indian Nations’, and the Synod of Ulster, in regular contact with Presbyterians in North America, addressed the King shortly afterwards, expressing the hope that ‘with her widely extended Empire the invaluable blessings of British freedom & of pure uncorrupted Christianity may spread, and be diffused to the remotest ends of the Earth’. The General Assembly of the Church of Scotland was just as enthusiastic. ‘As the chief obstacles which have hitherto prevented the instruction of the American nations are now removed,’ the Assembly noted in its congratulatory address to the King on the peace of Paris, ‘we trust . . . that the people now under your dominion which know not God, shall at length receive the knowledge of that holy faith which civilizes and refines the manners of men, at the same time that it improves and sanctifies their hearts’. This keenness to seize the opportunities presented by the successful conclusion of the Seven Years War did not necessarily have to increase rivalry between denominations, but it certainly seems to have had this effect in some instances. When the bishop of London was invited to become a trustee of the newly opened Dartmouth College, in New Hampshire, which aimed to train native converts, he declined on the grounds that the head of the college was not an Anglican, the prayers used did not confirm to the Anglican liturgy, and many of the trustees were Dissenters.

Between 1739 and 1763 Britain and Ireland experienced nearly a quarter of a century of more or less continuous warfare. At the end of this long struggle, the British empire was greatly expanded. War and imperial expansion had important repercussions for religious divisions and religious attitudes in the British Isles. As the conflicts of this period were waged against the Catholic Bourbon powers – France especially, but Spain also – it was almost inevitable that they would intensify anti-Catholic feeling among British and Irish Protestants.

94 Perry, Historical Collections ii, pp. 294–5.
95 Egerton, Sermon, pp. 20–1.
96 Records of the General Synod of Ulster, from 1691 to 1820 (3 vols., Belfast, 1890) ii, pp. 468, 473.
98 HMC, Dartmouth MSS (3 vols., London, 1887–96) ii, p. 79.
Protestant solidarity was not easily secured, given the deep differences between the different denominations, but it was achieved to a considerable extent. On the other hand, the demands of war, particularly in the 1750s and 1760s, led to a considerable mobilization of Catholic manpower, especially in Ireland. This mobilization, together with the decline of Jacobitism as an effective alternative to the Hanoverian regime (itself partly due to the military defeat of the Forty-five rebellion, which should be seen as an episode in the War of the Austrian Succession), and the expansion of empire as a result of the Seven Years War, started a process of Catholic rehabilitation that eventually matured into the Emancipation of 1829. These same developments helped to undermine Protestant unity, opening up a significant gap between Protestant Dissenters and the established churches of the three kingdoms. In brief, the mid-eighteenth-century wars, and the imperial expansion associated with the Seven Years War, had important short- and longer-term religious consequences, and deserve to be more widely recognized as pivotal events in British and Irish religious history.