

“Not a Question of Trust, but of Proof”:

Malcolm Hay, *A Chain of Error in Scottish History*, and the History Wars of 1920s Scotland

by

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## Author's Declaration

I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis. This is a true copy of the thesis, including any required final revisions, as accepted by my examiners.

I understand that my thesis may be made electronically available to the public.

# Abstract

The publication of *A Chain of Error in Scottish History* by Malcolm Hay in 1927, which concerned anti-Catholic bias in Scottish historical literature sparked controversy in Britain and Ireland. Negative reviews posted in *The Times Literary Supplement* and *Scottish Historical Review* were met with anger not only from Roman Catholics in Britain, but also Protestants sympathetic to Hay. Existing literature situated the debate over the book's publication primarily in terms of Catholic-Protestant sectarianism and historiographical methodology, but not its deeper societal causes. I utilised historical documents from the University of Aberdeen belonging to Malcolm Hay, such as newspaper clippings and correspondence, as well as research in digital archives, to better understand the controversy itself. I also supplemented this information with research into the social history of Europe to understand its historical context. I found that the controversy's direct historiographical and sectarian causes were in turn rooted in the crisis liberal capitalism, which supported both Protestantism and a pro-Protestant school of history in Britain, faced after the First World War. In addition, I discovered that a single individual, James Houston Baxter, had written both controversial reviews, making the Protestants appear more anti-Hay than previously appeared. Finally, I compared the controversy to that of modern-day history wars, noting commonalities both in their origins and the manner they unfolded.

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# Dedication

To my great-grandmother, Kim Sang-sun (1916-2011).

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## Quotation

“Exactly how much a country loses when, through the extensive neglect of rational historical study, contact with the past has been severed, cannot easily be estimated. To many superficial minds the damage is invisible, but the misrepresentation of history is a matter which does not merely concern the descendants or successors of the misrepresented... people who had been nourished on this kind of literature lost intellectual freedom; they learned to believe what they saw printed; they who welcomed the principle lost the power of private judgment.”<sup>1</sup>

— Malcolm Vivian Hay

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<sup>1</sup> Malcolm Vivian Hay, *A Chain of Error in Scottish History* (London, UKA: Longmans, Green and Co., 1927),

## Introduction: “History Has... Ceased to Exist”

A ubiquitous feature of the late 20th century and early 21<sup>st</sup>-century practice of history are the history wars, controversies over how the past should be understood and the public’s relationship to it. From the late 20th century, many commentators, mainly conservative, have claimed that a deep ideological schism in the study of history had begun in the 60s, and wish that history could go back to being an objective study of the past, unscathed by partisan and ideological conflicts.<sup>2</sup> However, this presumption is an illusion. George Orwell, lamenting the systemic distortions of history by the Nazis, wrote in a 1944 letter, “Already history has in a sense ceased to exist, i.e. there is no such thing as a history of our times which could be universally accepted, and the exact sciences are endangered as soon as military necessity ceases to keep people up to the mark.”<sup>3</sup>

Neither were controversies at the time Orwell was writing a novelty; indeed, to a twenty-first century historian, the historical controversy around the church history of Scotland in the late 1920s may strike them as having the echoes of more recent history wars and the concerns that fuel them. This presage to the contemporary history wars was instigated by the publication of *A Chain in Error in Scottish History* in 1927 by Malcolm Vivian Hay, an Aberdeen scholar specialising in history, who was formerly a cryptographer in the First World War. The controversy was not only about historical distortions which occurred in the recent past, Hay sought to address the systemic bias he accused Protestant Scottish historians

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<sup>2</sup>Gary B Nash, Charlotte Crabtree, and Nash E Dunn, *History on Trial: Culture Wars and the Teaching of the Past* (New York, NY: Vintage, 2000), 75-7.

<sup>3</sup>George Orwell, Sonia Orwell, and Ian Angus, *As I Please, 1943-1946* (Boston, MA: D.R. Godine, 2000), 149.



of holding for centuries against Catholics which in turn had shaped the history of Christianity in Scotland. The scope of the book is extensive despite its comparative brevity, addressing the historiography of Church history throughout the entire Middle Ages and its treatment by historians from the Reformation to the 20<sup>th</sup> century. However, particular focus was given to the Protestant claims for an independent Celtic Church, which claimed that the Celtic Christians, the first Christians of the British Isles, were an independent denomination of Christianity that was forcibly suppressed by the Catholic Church, with the Scottish Reformation being portrayed as a restoration of “true” Christianity to Scotland. This notion was described as “the Proto-Protestant Thesis” by the 21<sup>st</sup> century historian of Scotland Clifford Williamson who discussed Hay. In its place, Hay advocated what could be deemed the Papal Supremacy Thesis, which posited that Celtic Christians considered themselves members of the universal Catholic Church as it existed before the Great Schism of 1054 and hence as subjects of the Pope.<sup>4</sup>

The *Chain of Error* proved to be controversial upon its release. Although given high praise by many of Hay’s fellow Catholics, as well as even by some Protestants, more hard-line adherents to the Proto-Protestant Thesis slammed the book in reviews published in such prominent journals as *The Scottish Historical Review* and the *Times Literary Supplement*. These reviews angered Roman Catholic activists, as well as Catholic historians, who in turn cited these negative reviews in prominent places as proof of the suppression of Catholicism in Great Britain. Some Protestant sympathisers defended *A Chain of Error* from what they perceived as unfair criticism.<sup>5</sup> Finally, contemporary documents seem to suggest that the

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<sup>4</sup> Clifford Williamson, *The History of Catholic Intellectual Life in Scotland, 1918-1965* (London, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 185-7.

<sup>5</sup> Williamson, *Catholic Intellectual Life*, 185-7.

book was boycotted by Protestant booksellers and that Protestant-run newspapers and journals refused to discuss it. The true extent or even the actual existence of the boycott cannot be ascertained, but even claims of its existence attest to the extent of the controversy.

Like other history wars waged closer to the present, the history wars around *A Chain of Error* did not arise in a vacuum. Instead, they resulted in part from deep-seated instabilities and insecurities arising in Europe in the aftermath of the First World War, which discredited the pre-war classical liberalism which had hitherto dominated Western society including Britain, and which prompted mass movements such as communism and fascism. One result of this turmoil in Scotland was increased anti-Catholic sectarianism fuelled by immigration from the newly established Republic of Ireland as immigrants became a scapegoat for various social problems. Right-wing leaders, particularly in the Church of Scotland, painted Catholics as alien to the country, which contaminated a “purity” which existed not only since the Reformation but since the first days of Christianity in the British Isles. To justify these sectarian claims, history was used (or abused) by church leaders such as Church of Scotland Moderator John White to depict Scotland as an inherently Protestant country and that Catholics were aliens and enemies.<sup>6</sup> The Proto-Protestant Thesis, which had existed since the 16th century to lend legitimacy to the emerging Presbyterian Church, played into the hands of propagandists, as it provided seeming proof that Scotland had been Protestant since its earliest days, and that the Catholics would forcibly impose their religion onto Protestants if given the chance.

The *Chain of Error* was written in response to these ultranationalist, pro-British and anti-Irish sectarians. Not only did it make its case using primary resources and demonstrated

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<sup>6</sup> Williamson, *Catholic Intellectual Life*, 175-6

how these sources had been selectively and misleadingly quoted from by Protestant propagandists, but Hay also argued that these research errors were systematic distortions created by and perpetuated by generations of anti-Catholic historians.

The *Chain of Error* is not only illuminating for the most openly political facets of its controversy. It also highlighted tensions within the British historical community in the 1920s. British history largely remained the realm of independently wealthy gentlemen often associated with the Whig school of history, which posited that Britain was unique in its liberal constitution which Protestantism engendered. According to the Whig historians, the past is regarded as a series of events that teleologically resulted in United Kingdom becoming a Protestant society.<sup>7</sup> This contrasted with another school of historiography, based on the innovations of the Prussian historian Leopold von Ranke, which strived for objectivity and empirical research carried out by professional historians researching in official archives.<sup>8</sup> Although Ranke himself was a German nationalist whose vision of history entailed the division of the world into civilisations like that of Germany since antiquity, the gulf between Whig and Rankean historiography became wider and wider after his death, and Ranke's students abandoned the nationalist essentialism of their teacher. The controversy arose at a turning point in British historiography when the decline of classical liberalism discredited the Whig school, yet no new school succeeded.

Hay's book was not only about the proper and improper uses of the historical method. Instead, it was an attack on the intellectual foundations of the post-war Protestant British

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<sup>7</sup> Michael Bentley, *Modern Historiography: An Introduction* (London, UK: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2015), 63, 79-80.

<sup>8</sup> Michael Bentley, *Modern Historiography: An Introduction* (London, UK: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2015), 39.

establishment, which continued to fashion itself according to the Whig School of History by presenting Britain as the paragon of progress and liberty, which the ultranationalists of the 1920s still referred to in their anti-Catholic rhetoric. As such, Hay's book was regarded as a threat by these sectarians, who found it necessary to launch counterattacks on it in turn. One prominent opponent of Hay, James Houston Baxter, published negative reviews of the book in the prominent journals the *Scottish History Review* and the *Times Literary Supplement*. Contemporary literature also suggest that Protestant booksellers enacted an unofficial boycott around the book. Catholics had great reason to rally around Hay, as his book lent vital credence to their cause by arguing that it was they, not the Protestants, who were the original Christians of the British Isles.

*A Chain of Error in Scottish History* was influential on two accounts. First, the book would influence Catholic writers in Scotland to defy the Protestant-centric narratives and to produce Catholic-centred histories of their own, such as *Catholicism and Scotland* by Compton Mackenzie.<sup>9</sup> To a lesser extent, church historians outside of Scotland, primarily Catholics, would also refer to Hay's writing when discussing Scottish ecclesiastical history. In addition, *A Chain of Error's* publication and the controversy in question testify to the volatile nature of history and historiography. It demonstrated that the way we think about the past is not fixed in stone but depends on prevailing social systems and the culture of the day, which are constantly changing: when antagonistic forces collide, culture wars and history wars can result. This is not limited to the late 20th or 21st century but was a marked feature of historiography whenever social changes or turmoil emerged.

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<sup>9</sup> Clifford Williamson, *The history of Catholic Intellectual Life in Scotland, 1918-1965*. (London, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 188-9.

# Sectarianism, Nationalism and Celtic Christianity to

1926

From its inception in the late 18th and early 19th centuries, nationalism was deeply intertwined with religion, and even a surface-level analysis of Western history in these periods will make this apparent. According to UCLA professor of sociology Rogers Brubaker, there are four ways in which religion and nationalism are linked. First, the two may be regarded as similar phenomena, a point of view that late 19th and early 20th century thinkers such as Emil Durkheim and Carlton J.H. Hayes expounded. The latter believed in an external power, the nation, with national heroes (for example George Washington in the United States) serving as gods or saints, a mythology describing the nation's glorious past, present and future, and rituals such as national days or the commemoration of said national heroes. However, Carlton Hayes also pointed out that there were differences between the two. Most religions attempt to convert the world, whereas nationalism “re-enshrines the earlier tribal mission of a chosen people’, with its ‘tribal selfishness and vainglory’”.<sup>10</sup> Paralleling the “nationalism as religion” metaphor built up by Carlton Hayes and others, Brubaker also suggested that the basic structure of religion and nationalism are similar: both religion and nationalism are forms of social identification, as well as manners in which people relate themselves to the world: “Understood as perspectives on the world rather than things in the

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<sup>10</sup> Rogers Brubaker, “Religion and Nationalism: Four Approaches,” *Nations and Nationalism* 18, no. 1 (2011): 2–20, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1469-8129.2011.00486.x>, 3.

world, they are ways of understanding and identifying oneself, making sense of one's problems and predicaments, identifying one's interests and orienting one's action."<sup>11</sup>

Scholars and historians of nationalism like Brubaker and Shane Nagle have also noted that religion can condition societies in ways that make nationalism favourable. The Reformation is a particularly notable example. First, by emphasising the doctrine of the Priesthood of All Believers, the doctrine that all Christians have equal access to God, Protestants began to define themselves as communities of equals under God, which laid the grounds for the idea that these communities could begin to think of themselves as united by language, a vital definition of the nation during the nineteenth century.<sup>12</sup>

A third way the Reformation paved the way for nationalism also bears further description. By dividing Western Europe into Catholic and Protestant communities, separated by region, the Reformation encouraged their inhabitants to think of themselves not only as inhabitants of a single area or members of a particular religious denomination, but also that their denomination was integral to their regional and later national identity. For example, starting from the 19th century, most of the inhabitants of Ireland and Germany came to identify their countries as respectively being "Catholic" and "Protestant" nations in a process described by Shane Nagle as being the "confessionalisation" of the nation-state. To boost these claims of these respective religions as inherent to the nation-state, historians from these regions wrote histories emphasising that their nation would not have come into existence without these religions.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Brubaker, "Religion and Nationalism", 4.

<sup>12</sup> Brubaker, "Religion and Nationalism", 6-7.

<sup>13</sup> John Wolffe and Shane Nagle, "Protestant-Catholic Conflict and Nationalism in German and Irish Historical Narratives," in *Irish Religious Conflict in Comparative Perspective: Catholics, Protestants and Muslims* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 129-45, 141.

Religion and nationalism may also be intertwined in the form of religious nationalism. First, the existence of a specific nation may be directly tied to a specific religion or sect is often a source of rhetoric and imagery by which nationalists propagandise. Religious language and symbolism have been extensively used to provide meaning and purpose, particularly in what another sociologist of religion, A.D. Smith, has called the “myth of ethnic election”.<sup>14</sup> An example of this myth of ethnic election in Scottish history was the ideology of the social reformer and evangelical leader Thomas Chalmers, who saw Scotland as a “godly commonwealth” tied together by Protestantism.<sup>15</sup>

Sociologist Roger Friedland also describes nationalism in “statist” terms, as:

A state-centred form of collective subject formation’; as a program for the co-constitution of the state and the territorially bounded population in whose name it speaks’; and as a set of discursive practices by which the territorial identity of a state and the cultural identity of the people whose collective representation it claims are constituted as a singular fact.<sup>16</sup>

Friedland intentionally does not describe by what means states have defined the nation, as different nations have used other criteria. Nevertheless, he notes that religion is often an ideal candidate for forming national identities. Religion also provides “models of authority” and “imaginings of an ordering power”, and is a “totalising order capable of regulating every aspect of life” by protecting traditional mores that ruling classes are interested in preserving, such as those about sexuality and religion.<sup>17</sup> For example, in the *Report of Committee to*

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<sup>14</sup> Brubaker, “Religion and Nationalism”, 6; 9-10.

<sup>15</sup> Brown, *Religion in Scotland*, 63.

<sup>16</sup> Brubaker, “Religion and Nationalism”, 9-13.

<sup>17</sup> Brubaker, “Religion and Nationalism”, 9-13.

*Consider Overtures from the Presbytery of Glasgow and from the Synod of Glasgow and Ayr on 'Irish Immigrants' and the 'Education (Scotland) Act 1918*, better known as *The Menace of the Irish Nationality to the Scottish Race*, published in 1923,<sup>18</sup> the Church of Scotland accused Irish immigrants in Scotland of various moral failings, such as being overly dependent on welfare and not being interested in work, as well as breaking the Sabbath by holding secular events like concerts instead of spending the day worshipping God as Presbyterians taught it should be spent.<sup>19</sup>

This identification of the nation as being associated with a particular religion or denomination meant that nationhood was not only defined by being members of a specific religion or a denomination, but that religious minorities would be excluded. For much of its history, Ireland was marked by sectarianism between Catholics and Protestants. From the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Catholic Church, to which the majority of Irish adhered, supported the causes of Irish home rule and later independence, while the Protestants largely descended from English and Scottish settlers advocating closer ties to Britain and opposed Irish autonomy. Violence between Catholics and Protestants over the question of independence reached a head during the Irish War of Independence between 1919 and 1921, with 453 people killed and another 5000 driven from their homes over religious violence in Belfast.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Wafa El Fekih Said, "Perception of Criminality among Migrants and the Myth of Equality in Scotland," in *Le Crime, Le Châtiment et Les Écossais: Crime, Punishment and the Scots*, ed. Marion Amblard (Besançon, France: Presses universitaires de Franche-Comté, 2021), <https://books.openedition.org/pufc/38620?lang=en>.

<sup>19</sup> Christopher N. Johnson and William Sands, "Report of Committee to Consider Overtures from the Presbytery of Glasgow and from the Synod of Glasgow and Ayr on 'Irish Immigrants' and the 'Education (Scotland) Act 1918,'" in *Reports on the Schemes of the Church of Scotland with the Legislative Acts Passed by the General Assembly, 1923*, 750–62.

<sup>20</sup> Stewart J Brown, "Churches and Communal Violence in the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries: A Comparison of Ireland and Scotland," in *Irish Religious Conflict in Comparative Perspective: Catholics, Protestants and Muslims*, ed. John Wolffe (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 107–28.



## Church History of Scotland from 400 to 1929

Religion and politics, together with nationalism, have been profoundly linked in Scotland since the 16th century and the Reformation. In addition, many nationalist conceptions of Scottish history also draw from the ecclesiastical history of Scotland, making a summary of the religious history of Scotland necessary before any further discussion on the relationship between religion and nationalism in Scotland can take place. The earliest records of missionary activity are obscure. The first named missionary to the Picts, one of the oldest attested inhabitants of what would become Scotland in the historical record, was the 5<sup>th</sup> century Ninian of Whithorn, a Briton whose activities were heavily exaggerated by later Welsh and Anglo-Saxon writers who wished to depict him as a British counterpart to Saint Patrick.<sup>21</sup> Better attested is the 6<sup>th</sup> century Kentigern, who established a mission at the site of modern-day Dumbarton at the mouth of the River Clyde near Glasgow.<sup>22</sup> Gaelic missionaries from Ireland also began preaching in the Hebrides and along the west coast of the mainland, most famously Saint Columba, who built a monastery at Iona, a small island off the west coast of the Isle of Mull. Columba's career was heavily associated with the Kingdom of Dal Riada, a Gaelic kingdom in the area which brought Gaelic culture to Scotland. The Dál Ríada King Aédan was said to have been crowned by Columba in 574, and his victories against the Picts were said to have been because of Columba's prayers.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Katherine Forsyth, "Origins: Scotland to 1100," in *Scotland: A History*, ed. Jenny Wormald (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2011), 9–37.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Forsyth, "Origins: Scotland to 1100," 22.

Columba, his monastic “confederation” (as the group of monasteries that traced their descent to Columba is known), and the Christians of the British Isles in the 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> centuries were part of Celtic Christianity. Although nominally a part of the wider Christian Church, it had several highly divergent practices that set them apart from other Christians at the time. Due to the lack of large towns or cities in Ireland, the church only had vestiges of episcopal organisation, as these were episcopal seats in Britain and the continent. While bishops were still present to perform ordinations, confirmations, and consecrations of churches, most of their administrative duties were handled by abbots of monasteries, where abbots were not bishops themselves. Many Irish men and women became monks and nuns in the first few centuries of Ireland’s Christianisation in a process called “peregrinatio” in Latin, and subsequently Irish monasteries became great centres of learning, scholarship, and art.<sup>24</sup> By virtue of Columba’s mission, Iona in Scotland became an important intellectual centre, with chronicles, royal annals, Bible commentaries and law textbooks all being written there.<sup>25</sup>

These divergent customs were not unusual by the standards of Early Medieval Europe. Although the Pope was seen as having a special primacy, being the successor of St Peter who Jesus himself supposedly ordained, he was not supposed to interfere in local church affairs unless specifically requested to by the parties in question. Many at the time regarded the highest Christian authorities to be the periodic ecumenical councils, not the papacy. In 553, a controversy where the Pope condemned the members of a previous ecumenical council as

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<sup>24</sup> John Thomas McNeill, *The Celtic Churches: A History A.D. 200 to 1200* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1975), 70-71.

<sup>25</sup> Forsyth, “Origins”, 21-3.

heretical led to a temporary schism in the Roman Catholic Church that was only partly resolved by the 7<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>26</sup>

However, other idiosyncrasies of Celtic Christianity led to direct conflict with their continental counterparts, as such differences were regarded as threatening the inherent unity of the Christian Church. The most infamous ecclesiastical dispute was over the complex calculation of Easter. From 525 CE onwards, the standard Easter calculation, or *computus*, used in the West was based on the tables of Dionysius Exiguus, where the date of Easter repeats after 542 years and assumes that the equinox occurs on March 21. Another series of tables used were the 532-year cycle calculated by the scholar Victorius. In the British Isles, an archaic series of tables for calculating Easter, known today as the “Celtic-84” tables, was used, which assumed the equinox fell on March 25, where Easter dates repeated after 84 years.<sup>27</sup>

Contemporary Christian clergy took the variance in calculating Easter seriously for several reasons. First, that regions celebrate fundamental holidays such as Easter at different times undermined the concept of a united Christian church with shared beliefs and forms of worship. These variant celebration times affected not only Easter, but also every holiday that was defined not by a fixed calendar date, but by its relationship to Easter, such as Shrove Tuesday (also known as Mardi Gras), Ash Wednesday, and the Trinity Feast. Second, the observance of Lent in the 40 days before Easter meant the Church prescribed many stringent practices, such as prohibitions on meat and dairy products, and the performance of stricter

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<sup>26</sup> Caitlin Corning, *The Celtic and Roman Traditions: Conflict and Consensus in the Early Medieval Church* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 30-1.

<sup>27</sup> Corning, *Celtic and Roman Traditions*, 9-13.

penance rituals, fasting, and even sexual relations between married couples.<sup>28</sup> The disputes between which Easter tables was to be observed, which differed by nearly a month in some cases, could severely disrupt the life cycles of not only clergy and monks, but lay Christians as well. Finally, there were concerns about theological and symbolic meanings over the date of Easter, such as which table calculated Easter Sunday to be closest to Passover. This symbolism was significant as according to Christianity, Jesus, the symbolic Passover lamb, was sacrificed and resurrected not only for the Hebrews, but all of humanity.<sup>29</sup>

The first evidence of a dispute between the Roman and Celtic methods for calculating Easter came from the letters of Columbanus to Pope Gregory the Great in 600. Columbanus was born c. 550 in Leinster and became a monk in his 20s. Around 590, he travelled to the European continent, establishing a monastery in Gaul at the behest of King Childebert II of Austrasia and Burgundy. However, Columbanus was exiled from Burgundy after refusing to bless the illegitimate children of Childebert's successor, Theudric II, at the behest of the latter's grandmother Queen Brunhild, and the two persecuted Columbanus' followers. Columbanus spent much of his later life travelling around Gaul and Northern Italy where he died in the town of Bobbio in 615.<sup>30</sup>

At this point, the differences between the Celtic and Roman traditions became conspicuous in the minds of some Christian intellectuals who declared their support for Celtic-84 and criticised the Victorian tables using arguments relating to scripture, the symbolism of different dates of Easter, and the authority of previous figures who had

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<sup>28</sup> Corning, *Celtic and Roman Traditions*, 10-11.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Corning, *Celtic and Roman Traditions*, 22-4.

supposedly supported Celtic-84.<sup>31</sup> Finally, Columbanus emphasised that he and the Irish were not wayward heretics, but loyal members of the Christian Church supported by Rome, writing:

“We Irish are disciples of Saints Peter and Paul and of all the disciples who wrote the Sacred Canon by the Holy Ghost, and we accept nothing outside the evangelical and apostolic writings; none has been a Judaizer, none a schismatic; but the Catholic Faith, as it was delivered by you first, who are the successors of the Holy Apostles, is maintained unbroken.”<sup>32</sup>

Despite Columbanus’ appeals, the controversy did not abate for much of the 7th century. The Venerable Bede recorded several disputes in customs between the native British bishops and St Augustine of Canterbury, the first Archbishop of Canterbury, who was sent by the Pope to preach to the Anglo-Saxons, over controversies such as the celebration of Easter.<sup>33</sup> An attempt to solve the Easter Controversy occurred at the Synod of Whitby. The “Roman” and “Celtic” parties formally argued in favour of their causes; however, the conclusion was that Jesus had given the Keys to the church to St. Peter, and therefore the Celts were compelled to use the Dionysian tables. Despite this conclusion, it would be until approximately 770 CE before the transition to the Dionysian tables was complete.<sup>34</sup>

While the number of people in the British Isles who continued to adhere to the Celtic-84 tables to celebrate Easter continued to dwindle, this was not the end of distinctive practices in the region. In the 8<sup>th</sup> century, a movement of reformers appeared in Ireland

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<sup>31</sup> Corning, *Celtic and Roman Traditions*, 19, 24, 26-8.

<sup>32</sup> Corning, *Celtic and Roman Traditions*, 32.

<sup>33</sup> Corning, 70-3.

<sup>34</sup> Corning, 18, 124-5, 129.

known as the Céle Dé, or culdees, whose name literally translates to the “Servants of God”, who also referred themselves as “true clerics” or “true monks”, criticised what they believed to be laxity among fellow clergy. They wished to adhere more strictly to monastic rules such as poverty and celibacy. However, the new movement had no checks and balances to ensure corruption did not arise again, which alongside the Viking invasions of the British Isles, contributed to its eventual downfall.<sup>35</sup> In Scotland, there also existed many Culdee houses as late as the 11th century; however, it was during this era that the English-born Queen Margaret brought the first Benedictine monks from the European continent to the kingdom. Over the coming centuries, more continental European monks and priests were brought over to Scotland which led to the extinction of the Culdees and the integration of Scotland into the continental traditions of the Roman Catholic Church.<sup>36</sup>

The next great change to the religious landscape of Scotland came in the 16<sup>th</sup> century with the Scottish Reformation. Initial attempts to reform the Scottish church were met with great resistance from the Kings and Queens of the reigning House of Stuart. In the early part of the century, James V made many attempts to burn any Protestant preacher for heresy until his death in 1542. The most famous was Patrick Hamilton, who was executed in 1528 and became a martyr for the Protestant cause. Other early Scottish Protestants were exiled from the kingdom.<sup>37</sup>

The most famous of these exiles was the Calvinist preacher John Knox. Converting to Protestantism in 1543, Knox became a leader of an unsuccessful Protestant rebellion in St

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<sup>35</sup> James Patrick Mackey and Peter O’Dwyer, “Celtic Monks and the Culdee Reform,” in *An Introduction to Celtic Christianity* (Edinburgh, UK: T & T Clark, 1995), 140–71, 140-143; 170-17

<sup>36</sup> Forsyth, “Origins”, 37.

<sup>37</sup> Clare Kellar, *Scotland, England, and the Reformation: 1534-61* (Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press, 2008), 26-7.

Andrews, and was imprisoned, forced to work on a galley, and exiled. Knox settled in Geneva where he became a Calvinist. In the winter of 1555 Knox returned to Scotland, where he toured the country and was able to recruit various nobles to his cause.<sup>38</sup> Knox was then forced into exile a second time to England in 1558 before returning less than a year later. Knox's second return was during a popular rebellion in support of his ideals, and his coming began a chain reaction of nobles rallying to the Protestant cause: first the Earl of Glencairn, and then the Earl of Argyll and Lord James Stuart, who initially supported the Catholic monarchy, and the chief of Clan Hamilton. The rebellion grew to the point where soldiers from France, where Mary Queen of Scots lived with her husband King Francis II, were deployed to crush them. The French in turn were defeated by English troops sent to Scotland to support the rebellion, and the Protestants were victorious. In 1560, the Scottish Parliament proclaimed Protestantism to be the state religion and formally abolished the Catholic Church in Scotland.<sup>39</sup>

Disputes over how the new National Church of Scotland, or the [National] Kirk, was to be organised erupted into open violence in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. In 1610, James VI restored bishops to the Church of Scotland after their abolition in 1560s by Knox and his fellow Calvinists and attempted to reintroduce ritualism back into Scotland through the Five Articles of Perth in 1617. This angered the Calvinist Presbyterians who dominated Parliament, as they believed the Kirk should be governed by councils of elected elders, that rituals in worship were un-Christian, and that the crown-supported Episcopalism was too Catholic. This set the

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<sup>38</sup> Roger Mason, "Renaissance and Reformation: The Sixteenth Century," essay, in *Scotland: A History*, ed. Jenny Wormald (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2011), 123–49, 107-8.

<sup>39</sup> Roger Mason, "Renaissance and Reformation" 110-12.

ground for a conflict between Episcopalians and Presbyterians, which in turn was part of a wider struggle between the Crown and Parliament.<sup>40</sup>

In 1638, tensions between the Royalists and Parliamentarians boiled over with the signing of the National Covenant by prominent nobles and members of the professional classes in the towns. This document stipulated that King Charles I, who succeeded James VI following the latter's death, enforce the Presbyterian reforms of 1560. Charles' refusal sparked Wars of the Three Kingdoms that were waged in all the British Isles between the royalist Cavaliers and the parliamentarian Covenanters (or Roundheads as they were known in England and Ireland). The wars continued until Charles was deposed and executed by the English in 1649, an act that angered the Scots, who desired a constitutional monarchy that respected the covenants, and crowned Charles I's son as Charles II in 1651. The English general Oliver Cromwell invaded Scotland in 1651 and imposed martial law before declaring himself Lord Protector of the Commonwealth of England, Scotland, and Ireland in 1653. Although Cromwell was a Calvinist member of the Puritan movement, he was unpopular in Scotland for his autocratic, militaristic rule, and his imposition of high taxes.<sup>41</sup>

After Cromwell's death, the Commonwealth was abolished, and Charles II was formally installed on the throne. In Scotland, politics remained split between the Royalists and Covenanters, paralleled by the ongoing conflict between Episcopalianism and Presbyterianism. This situation was complicated by the fact that Charles II now lived in London and communicated with the Scottish government through the Earl of Lauderdale, the King's secretary and commissioner. In the 1680s, violence erupted between the two groups

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<sup>40</sup> Jenny Wormald, "Confidence and Perplexity: The Seventeenth Century," in *Scotland: A History*, ed. Jenny Wormald (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2011), 123–49, 128.

<sup>41</sup> Wormald, "Confidence and Perplexity", 136-9.



when Covenanters murdered the Archbishop of St Andrews and an anti-government uprising began; in turn the murderers and rebels were hunted down and executed by the Scottish government in a series of violent events known as the Killing Times. However, when Charles II died in 1688 and his openly Catholic son James II and VII became King of England, Scotland, and Ireland, it was the English who launched the Glorious Revolution against James. The revolutionaries deposed James in favour of his daughter Queen Mary and her husband William, the Prince of Orange. With the greatest patrons of Episcopalianism in Scotland being overthrown, the Kirk formally abolished diocesan organisation in 1690.<sup>42</sup>

Nevertheless, the bishops of the Kirk refused to support William and Mary on the grounds that it violated their oaths to James II. The Episcopal Church, now separate from the Kirk, continued to support the exiled House of Stuart and the descendants of James as part of the Jacobite movement, which launched two rebellions to retake power in 1715 and 1745 without success. Due to these Jacobite associations, and despite its similarities to the Church of England, Episcopalianism was banned by the British government until the 1790s. Afterwards, Episcopalianism became strongly associated with those upper-class landowners who were not already Presbyterian, but their numbers dwindled because of its social exclusivity and similarities to Catholicism. By 1851, only 2.5% of all churchgoers in Scotland were Episcopalian.<sup>43</sup>

After the Glorious Revolution and the Jacobite Rebellions, Presbyterianism became the largest and most powerful religious denomination in Scotland. Hence, Presbyterianism and Scottish identity became increasingly intertwined. In line with Friedland's theory of religious

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<sup>42</sup> Wormald, "Confidence and Perplexity", 140-142.

<sup>43</sup> Callum G. Brown, *The Social History of Religion in Scotland since 1730* (London, UK: Methuen & Co. Ltd, 1987), 48-9; 73.

nationalism, prominent churchmen such as Thomas Chalmers, head of the Evangelical Party in the National Kirk in the first half of the nineteenth century,<sup>44</sup> regarded Presbyterianism as the chief tie that bound Scots together and regarded the country as a Presbyterian “Godly commonwealth”. Chalmers subsequently led many campaigns such as the construction of schools and churches to restore the Presbyterian “Godly commonwealth” to its rightful status in the 1820s and 1830s.<sup>45</sup>

By 1851, 91% of all Scottish churchgoers were Presbyterian.<sup>46</sup> Nevertheless, these Presbyterians were not all members of the National Church of Scotland, with several schisms occurring by this date. In the 1750s, the National Kirk had become divided between the Moderates, largely upper class members of the Kirk who supported religious moderation, aristocratic refinement, and increased ties to England. Set against them was the radical Evangelical Party which drew largely from the growing middle classes arising out of the Industrial Revolution. By 1761, two churches had split from the National Church: the Secession Church and the Relief Church. During the 1820s, 29% of the Scottish population belonged to a dissenting Presbyterian Church. Nevertheless, the number of Evangelists in the National Kirk reached such numbers that from 1834 to 1843 they and the Moderates fought a sustained conflict over control of the Kirk and matters such as the relationship between church and state. This conflict resulted in the Disruption of 1843, where approximately 40% of National Kirk members, the Evangelist faction, formed the Free Church of Scotland, or the

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<sup>44</sup> Stewart J Brown, “Chalmers, Thomas (1780–1847), Church of Scotland Minister and Social Reformer,” *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, October 4, 2007, <https://www.oxforddnb.com/display/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-5033>.

<sup>45</sup> Stewart J Brown, “Churches and Communal Violence in the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries: A Comparison of Ireland and Scotland,” in *Irish Religious Conflict in Comparative Perspective: Catholics, Protestants and Muslims*, ed. John Wolffe (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 107–28, 118-19.

<sup>46</sup> Brown, *Religion in Scotland*, 63.

Free Kirk headed by Thomas Chalmers. It was only in 1929 that the Free Kirk agreed to reunite with the National Kirk.<sup>47</sup>

Despite the Disruption, Presbyterians continued to advocate for their central role in Scottish national identity beyond the “Godly commonwealth” rhetoric. Many were elevated to national heroes alongside others such as William Wallace and Robert Burns. Dates central to the Scottish Reformation, such as the 300th anniversary of the Scottish Reformation in 1860, were commemorated nationwide, with the date of the specific tricentennial of the first general assembly of the National Kirk on December 20, government officials ordered shops to close early so people could attend church services honouring Knox’s memory.<sup>48</sup>

Presbyterianism was not only a supposedly unique Scottish institution, but in the minds of the nationalists, it was the superior form of Christianity, as it was the form that was the purest expression of the Word of God, serving as an exemplar for all to follow. The radical Calvinist reforms had done away with all forms of ritual that might separate Christians from God, and the doctrine of the Priesthood of All Believers made all Presbyterians equal in His eyes, without requiring mediators like priests or monks who could stand in their way. Exemplifying this mentality was a sermon of Reverend Dr Black held on the tricentenary of Knox’s death in 1562:

Neither in Germany nor in England had the work of the Reformation been as thoroughly done as in Scotland; and this explained how there were not purer forms of worship, sterner adherence to principle and truth, and more earnest contendings against error and threatened infringement of religious liberty, than in

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<sup>47</sup> Brown, *Religion in Scotland*, 30-33.

<sup>48</sup> James J. Coleman, *Remembering the Past in Nineteenth-Century Scotland: Commemoration, Nationality, and Memory* (Edinburgh, UK: Edinburgh University Press, 2014), 96.

our country. The drippings of Popery had remained in the Lutheran and English Church, and were yielding their bitter fruits in Rationalism and Ritualism.<sup>49</sup>

In the minds of Black and his contemporaries, Scottish people were uniquely pure in their faith, becoming an “ethnic elect” in Smith’s words, whose pureness of nationality faith—indeed, the word “elect” in the religious sense originated with Calvinism, used to define the faithful who alone were chosen to go to heaven by God at birth.

Nationalist historians also argued that Presbyterianism was at the heart of Scottish national values, such as a love of individual freedom and egalitarianism as embodied by the democratic nature of the Presbyterian church. Similarly, Presbyterians argued that the Kirk fostered education and learning, another core value of Scottish identity, which educated everyone equally, allowing poor people to acquire skills to escape poverty and become rich.<sup>50</sup> To a great extent, these claims were more myth than reality. For example, due to the remote nature of its geography, sparse population, and the fact that the predominantly Scottish Gaelic students could not understand the exclusively English-language lessons, education in the Highlands lagged significantly behind that in the Lowlands.<sup>51</sup> Nevertheless, these myths were central to cementing the status of Presbyterianism as the foundation stone of the Scottish nation.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Coleman, *Remembering the Past*, 100.

<sup>50</sup> Richard Finlay, *Scottish Nationalism: History, Ideology and the Question of Independence* (London, UK: Bloomsbury, 2023), 100.

<sup>51</sup> Charles W.J. Withers, *Gaelic in Scotland: 1698-1981: The Geographical History of a Language*, *Google Books* (Edinburgh, UK: John Donald, 1984), [https://www.google.ca/books/edition/Gaelic\\_in\\_Scotland\\_1698\\_1981/OU5REAAAQBAJ?hl=en&gbpv=0](https://www.google.ca/books/edition/Gaelic_in_Scotland_1698_1981/OU5REAAAQBAJ?hl=en&gbpv=0).

<sup>52</sup> Finlay, *Scottish Nationalism*, 100.

If Presbyterianism was identified with the Scottish nation, other denominations, such as Roman Catholicism, were seen as imports; at worst, they were considered alien threats to Scotland and Great Britain as a whole. The creation of a pan-British identity heavily centred on the notion of a Catholic “other” who was everything the British were not. These fears were not completely disconnected from reality: in Britain, incidents such as the Gunpowder Plot of 1605, when Catholic conspirators attempted to destroy the Houses of Parliament and assassinate King James VI and I, as well as the Jacobite rebellions when revolutionaries attempted to restore the Catholic House of Stuart to the British throne, did much to cement the image of Catholics as a hostile force to Britain. Similarly, reports of Catholic persecutions of Protestants, such as the expulsion of the Huguenots from France in 1685, also convinced many Protestant Britons that Catholicism posed a threat to Protestantism across the European continent. Events such as the Gunpowder Plot were widely commemorated in holidays such as Guy Fawkes Night and discussed in popular literature such as almanacs, while news reports of Catholic persecution of Protestants reached British people through newspapers. The result was the creation of a British identity through a siege mentality, where Britons were united by their shared Protestantism against hostile Catholic outsiders.<sup>53</sup>

This fear of Catholics persisted even when the number of Catholics in Britain dwindled, and would continue to be instrumental in the formation of local British identities such as Scottish nationalism. By the 19th century, only a few crofters in the Hebrides and some hereditary aristocratic families were Catholic; however, anti-Catholic sentiment remained, as if Presbyterianism was synonymous in the minds of Scottish nationalists with Scotland’s freedoms and rights, then the Roman Catholic Church from which the Presbyterians seceded

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<sup>53</sup> Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation, 1707-1837* (London, UK: Pimlico, 2003), 18-30.

became synonymous with foreign tyranny and subjugation. Therefore, the Scottish religious nationalists believed that Scotland was continually under threat by the sinister Catholic Church, which was waiting for any opportunity to subvert and destroy Presbyterianism and Scotland and its freedoms.<sup>54</sup>

The first significant wave of Scottish anti-Catholic sentiment in the 19th century occurred in the 1850s and 1860s with Irish migration to Scotland in the wake of the potato famine, which proved to be a substantial addition to the Scottish population, particularly the Catholic population.<sup>42</sup> In the two years after the beginning of the Famine in 1848, the Catholic population of Scotland quintupled in size from 30,000 to 150,000 by 1850. These migrants, traumatised by the mass death and starvation they had witnessed in Ireland and already wary of Protestants due to a long history of sectarian violence on the island, tenaciously clung to their Catholicism as a marker of identity. They formed tightly knit communities where the denomination played a leading role in their lives. They built Catholic churches and schools and founded many social institutions, from social welfare programmes to political organisations advocating Irish politics, such as the Home Rule movement, to football clubs.<sup>43</sup>

Scottish nationalists viewed this sudden increase in the Catholic population with considerable alarm. They often contrasted their nation and Presbyterian religion with that of Ireland, arguing that its subjugation by the British (including the Scottish settlers who became the Scots Irish) occurred because the conservative Catholic Church had hampered the economic development on the island, promoted personal immorality, and opposed political rights. They additionally claimed the lack of an Irish Reformation or a charismatic John

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<sup>54</sup> Coleman, *Remembering the Past*, 102.

Knox-like figure who could have rallied the Irish resulted in the colonisation of the island. Therefore, the Irish migrants became regarded with great suspicion as a potential fifth column by which the Catholic Church could supplant Presbyterian Scotland.<sup>55</sup>

Even before the Irish migrations following the famine, Presbyterian authorities were concerned with “Popish” or “Romish” influence in Scotland. In 1838, to commemorate the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the beginning of the Scottish Civil War, many religious leaders in Glasgow used the opportunities to warn their flock of the dangers of “Popery”. For example, Dr Nathaniel Paterson, claimed ““It was Popery, which sought a readier disguise amidst the drapery and formularies of that Church” that was the true enemies of the Covenanters, and warned Presbyterians that by “fawning on Rome and cursing our Zion, they are a disgrace to their noble sires”.<sup>56</sup> In 1860, after the migrations began, Dr Neil McMichael made a speech declaring that in contrast to Presbyterianism, “Popery” would “set her throne” “upon the ruins of national freedom” during the observations of the Scottish Reformation tricentennial.<sup>57</sup> At the same meeting that the previous speech was given, William Lindsay both praised Protestantism and attacked Catholicism, saying:

It is the glory of Britain, and of all countries where British blood predominates, that Shackles upon conscience are abhorred. But this very freedom only renders it more

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<sup>55</sup> Coleman, *Remembering the Past*, 102.

<sup>56</sup> ‘Great General Assembly of 1638’, *Glasgow Herald*, 24 December 1838, quoted in James J. Coleman, *Remembering the Past in Nineteenth-Century Scotland: Commemoration, Nationality, and Memory* (Edinburgh, UK: Edinburgh University Press, 2014), 102-3.

<sup>57</sup> *United Presbyterian Magazine*, June 1860, p. 261, quoted in James J. Coleman, *Remembering the Past in Nineteenth-Century Scotland: Commemoration, Nationality, and Memory* (Edinburgh, UK: Edinburgh University Press, 2014), 102-3..

imperative that error should be openly and vigorously assailed by argument, and particularly Popish errors, because they endanger the existence of this very freedom.<sup>58</sup>

To prevent a feared Catholic takeover of Scotland, many zealous Presbyterians, particularly members of the evangelical Free Church of Scotland, not only warned their fellow Protestants of the dangers of Catholicism but began open efforts to proselytise among the Irish migrants. The first was the “No Popery Movement”, founded in 1851 by National Kirk layman James Begg.<sup>59</sup> He regarded the Catholic Church as heretical and engaging in a dangerous conspiracy to eradicate “true” Protestant Christianity. Scotland was at risk of the Catholic conspiracy, according to Begg, but it and other Protestant nations were also crucial to the survival of Protestantism. In the Church of Scotland, John Hope, a wealthy layman, also took up the No Popery cause, publishing pamphlets and founded classes to evangelise to the Catholics. When Hope died, he left money in his estate to promote anti-Catholicism and various social causes which were popular in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, such as abstinence and temperance. Historians of Scottish sectarianism, such as Iain R Paterson, credit John Hope with the survival of anti-Catholic sentiment in Scotland in public consciousness into the late 19th century.<sup>60</sup>

Outside of Begg and Hope’s No Popery movement, other Presbyterians attempted to convert Catholic immigrants. Free Church minister Dugald MacColl began to preach openly in Catholic-majority neighbourhoods in Glasgow in 1860. The study of his brief career evangelising to Catholics is largely dependent on his own memoirs, and thus the following account must be taken with a degree of caution. It is also difficult to speculate whether the

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<sup>58</sup> Coleman, *Remembering the Past*, 102-4.

<sup>59</sup> Brown, “Churches and Communal Violence”, 119.

<sup>60</sup> Iain R Paterson et al., *Sectarianism in Scotland* (Edinburgh, UK: Edinburgh University Press, 1999), 15-18.



violence he claimed to have witnessed was caused by other factors, such as the presence of Fenians in Glasgow. The following paragraph thus summarises what MacColl claimed to have done in his memoirs. MacColl recalled building churches and a Sunday school in the Catholic-majority region of Bridgegate. In addition, he also preached publicly in what he called the Stone Pulpit. Supposedly, these evangelistic missions achieved some degree of success at first: MacColl claimed his church reached 250 members and that “hundreds” regularly attended his public sermons at the “Stone Pulpit”. However, as time passed, more Catholics began to resent his attempts to proselytise them. He recalled being harassed by hecklers and receiving threats of violence and warnings by the police to stop preaching, which he ignored. The result was widespread anger and a riot between Catholics and Protestants that included improvised explosives; for some time after, squads of Catholic militias patrolled their parts of Glasgow, while radical Protestants urged retaliatory violence that never materialised. Subsequently, Glasgow banned public preaching, which increased tensions between the municipal government and zealous Presbyterians.<sup>61 62</sup>

The Presbyterian nationalists and anti-Catholics of the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century were primarily confessionalists in Friedland’s sense that they believed religious denominations and nationality were inherently linked. They believed the primary threat to Catholicism posed to Scotland was that it was a “foreign” denomination, but if it was a foreign threat, it could be neutralised by converting the Catholics to Presbyterianism. Hence, while Begg believed that Catholics were engaged in a vast conspiracy to rule the world, merely preaching to them, and informing them about the dangers the Catholic Church posed was sufficient to stop it.

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<sup>61</sup> Dugald Maccoll, *Among the Masses, or, Work in the Wynds* (Glasgow, UK: Maclehose, 1872), 312-28.

<sup>62</sup> Brown, “Churches and Communal Violence”, 119.

However, by the 20th century, more radical forms of religious nationalism would target Scottish Catholics and Irish immigrants.

The First World War triggered great social and political upheavals in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Initially, the breakout of war was welcomed by many patriots and nationalists, who saw it as a way to overcome social, political, and religious tensions in Scotland at the time, such as between Catholics and Protestants.<sup>63</sup> However, as the war continued, and the human and material cost grew, tensions would once more flare up between these groups. As most of the Catholics in Scotland at this point were Irish, the history of Catholic-Protestant relations in this period became increasingly intertwined with the history of Ireland at the time.

As was the case in Scotland, Catholics and Protestants in Ireland initially rallied to the war. The Irish disputes over Home Rule had escalated to the point where militias began to form on political and sectarian lines, and the outbreak of World War I served to temporarily distract Irish people from a potential civil war.<sup>64</sup> Numerous casualties that dampened support for the conflict, with the 16th (Irish) Division being destroyed over the course of the war. This further radicalised the nationalists into beginning the Easter Rebellion in Dublin in 1916 and paved the way for the Irish war of independence in 1919. The high casualty rate of Irish soldiers during the war, combined with the British army's brutal suppression of the Easter Rising, led to an active anti-conscription movement that successfully prevented it from being implemented in Ireland.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Richard Finlay, "The Turbulent Century: Scotland since 1900," in *Scotland: A History*, ed. Jenny Wormald (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2011), 202.

<sup>64</sup> Stewart J Brown, "Churches and Communal Violence," 116–17.

<sup>65</sup> David Fitzpatrick, "Ireland and the Great War," in *The Cambridge History of Ireland*, ed. James Kelly (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 223–57, 223-230; 243-44.

Both Scotland and Ireland had approximately the same population of 4.5 million each. However, over 321,000 Scots served in the British Army, including 236,000 conscripts, of which 78,000 were killed. In contrast, Ireland supplied 231,000 soldiers, with up to 35,000 dying. The perceived lack of patriotism and mobilisation in Ireland, combined with the violence of the anti-war Easter Rising and the anti-conscription movement, became the source of much resentment in Scotland.<sup>66</sup>

Hibernophobia in the aftermath of the Irish War of Independence and the subsequent Civil War, which led to many Irish Catholics fleeing the violence and migrating to Scotland. Throughout this period, many Catholic migrants in Ireland continued to support Irish political causes, such as independence and political organisations like Sinn Fein and the IRA; by 1921, historian T. Gallagher noted that “by 1921 almost every Scottish town with a sizeable Irish presence had its own IRA company.”<sup>67</sup>

Protestant nationalists, already hostile towards Catholics, feared they would bring Ireland’s sectarian violence into Scotland. They no longer regarded Catholics as members of a different religion who could nevertheless be brought into the Scottish Presbyterian fold but as foreigners who could never assimilate Scottish culture, thus posing an existential threat. The National Church of Scotland became very zealous in spreading racialised anti-Catholic, anti-Irish sentiment during this period. In 1923, the General Assembly of the National Church published a report on the “Irish Menace”, which it described as being sabbath-breaking criminals who did nothing but live off welfare, “contributed nothing to Scotland”, and concluded that it must “take whatever steps necessary” to eliminate the threat.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Fitzpatrick, “Ireland and the Great War”, 231-2.

<sup>67</sup> Iain R Paterson et al., *Sectarianism in Scotland*, 38.

<sup>68</sup> Brown, “Churches and Communal Violence”, 119-20.

Much of this anti-Catholicism and Hibernophobia was a continuation of 19<sup>th</sup>-century tropes and rhetoric, such as foreign Catholics trying to subvert a “pure” Scottish Presbyterian nation, but the tumultuous social conditions caused by World War I resulted in a radicalisation of the rhetoric. Approximately 100,000 Scottish soldiers died in the war, and such death and destruction caused many to question the foundations of Scottish society. During this period, the Clyde Valley became known as the “Red Clyde” for its socialist movement, a socialist movement that also included many Irish Catholic migrants. Scottish factories ceased to produce consumer goods, which were already produced in only small amounts before the war and began focusing on armaments. Unlike other countries, which had diverse enough economies to return to manufacturing consumer goods after the war, the demand for heavy industries during the conflict destroyed the nascent consumer goods industry in Scotland. Exacerbating Scottish economic difficulties was a loss in demand for large warships that Scotland’s shipyards formerly produced, and the increased use of petroleum for fuel lessened demand for Scottish coal.<sup>69</sup> The National Kirk’s rhetoric of the “Irish menace” and calls for stricter border control was a part of this broader international trend. By narrowing the definition of the nation to increasingly narrow denominational, ethnic and linguistic lines, Scottish nationalists could re-assert their identity in the wake of these traumatic social changes.

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<sup>69</sup> Finlay, “Turbulent Century,”202-10.

## The Historiography of Celtic Christianity to 1927

In much of 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century Europe, historians sought to write histories of their communities, not only to emphasise the nation's unity since time immemorial, but also to demonstrate that their religion was integral to the development of their nation.<sup>57</sup> Scotland was not an exception to this: like their counterparts in other parts of the British Isles, Scottish historians looked to the distinct practices of the first Christians of the archipelago to legitimatise their Presbyterian and Scottish national identity. Like their counterparts in other parts of the British Isles, Scottish Protestants exaggerated the difference between the Celtic Christians and their continental counterparts, claiming that a separate Celtic Church, particularly identified with the Culdees in the earlier phases of the historiography of Celtic Christianity, had existed in the archipelago during the early Middle Ages which was proto-Protestant. By doing so, British Protestants could claim that they were not heretics or breaking with tradition when they seceded from the Roman Catholic Church but were restoring the Church in their nation to its original form.

Scottish historians supported the Proto-Protestant Thesis almost since the beginning of the Reformation. The first to do so was the humanist George Buchanan. Buchanan, whom historians Caroline Erskine and Roger A Mason named as being among the most significant members of the Scottish Renaissance, was educated in Paris, where he first became interested in the humanism and critiques of the Catholic Church. In addition to publishing Latin-language poems and plays, Buchanan also wrote attacks on the corruption of the Catholic clergy and on absolute power such as *De Iure Regni apud Scotos*, arguing that the people had a natural right to resist tyrannical monarchs who had overstepped the bounds of their power. These attacks on church and state power resulted in his exile from Scotland from 1539 to

1552. Although he was initially a supporter of Mary I, he eventually abandoned Catholicism and became a Presbyterian, supporting the revolt against her and becoming Moderator of the Church of Scotland in 1567.<sup>70</sup>

Buchanan died in 1582 while writing the *Rerum Scotiarum Historia*, a comprehensive history of Scotland from antiquity to the 16th century, which was published posthumously. In this text, Buchanan was the first scholar to assert that the Scots, Irish, Welsh, and Gauls were part of a Celtic people, as opposed to supporting mediaeval legends that claimed the former two had come from Spain or Egypt, and thus played a fundamental role in the development of Celtic studies.<sup>71</sup> Nevertheless, it is also important to note that the *Rerum* was not only a listing of past events, but also an attempt to prove that his theory of resistance to church and state power was a theme embedded in Scottish history, and that the events of 1560 were not just a rebellion caused by upstarts.<sup>72</sup>

As such, Buchanan became the first Scottish scholar to assert the Proto-Protestant Thesis, casting the Celtic Christians as resisters to the Catholic Church in a manner similar to his contemporary Presbyterians. To accomplish this, Buchanan built on a common misinterpretation of history during the period which held that Palladius, the first bishop sent to Ireland, was instead sent to Scotland. This misinterpretation stemmed from the fact that during the first centuries of the Middle Ages, the Latin toponym "Scotia" could not only mean Scotland, but Ireland as well. From this point, Buchanan concluded that the first Christians in Scotland "were governed only by Monks, without Bishops, with less Pomp and

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<sup>70</sup> Caroline Erskine and Roger A Mason, *George Buchanan: Political Thought in Early Modern Britain and Europe* (Oxford, UK: Routledge, 2017), 1-4.

<sup>71</sup> Ian C Bradley, *Celtic Christianity: Making Myths and Chasing Dreams*. (Edinburgh, UK: Edinburgh University Press, 2019), 95.

<sup>72</sup> Erskine and Mason, *George Buchanan*, 1-4.

external Ceremony, but with greater Integrity and Sanctimony of Life”.<sup>73</sup> Buchanan had a very negative view of Augustine of Canterbury, the first Bishop of Canterbury sent by the Roman Catholic Church to preach to the pagan Anglo-Saxons, describing him as an agent sent by the Catholic Church who “did not so much Preach the Christian Religion, as the Ceremonies of the Roman Church”, and endeavoured to stamp out true Christianity in Britain, which he described as being first taught by the disciples of John the Evangelist. Buchanan referenced the “Dispute, neither Necessary nor Advantageous” over the dating of Easter as a pretext to destroying the true proto-Protestant faith, leading Britain into a state of superstition and ignorance.<sup>74</sup>

Building on Buchanan’s narrative of an independent church of the British Isles (henceforth known as the Proto-Protestant Thesis, though it must be emphasised that the term “Celtic Church” would not come into use for approximately two centuries after the death of Buchanan), a later Scottish historian David Calderwood in his 1631 *A True History of the Church of Scotland* went further, identifying what would be known as the Celtic Christians as the Culdees and denying that they had monks, writing:

[The Culdees] were not Monkes... They were holie and religious men, exercised in teaching, prayer, meditatioun, and reading, for which exercises they were called Culdei, that is, Cultores Dei, because they were devote worshippers of God, and taught the

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<sup>73</sup> George Buchanan, *Buchanan’s History of Scotland*, II (London, UK: A. Bettesworth, W. Taylor, T. Bickerton, and J. Batley; E. Curll et al., 1722), 75., quoted in Ian C. Bradley, *Celtic Christianity: Making Myths and Chasing Dreams* (Edinburgh, UK: Edinburgh University Press, 2019), 96.

<sup>74</sup> George Buchanan et al., *The History of Scotland. Written in Latin, by George Buchanan. Faithfully Rendered into English* (London: Printed by E. Jones, for A. Churchil, and sold by S. Crouch, 1690), 157.

people how to worship God. They were not bound by the vow of obedience to ridiculous rules, nor of chastity to a single life.<sup>75</sup>

Palladius was explicitly identified as a Papal agent sent to suppress the Culdees, as was Augustine of Canterbury. Like Buchanan, he credited the Synod of Whitby with the end of this golden age.<sup>76</sup> He argued that the Roman Catholic Church forcibly suppressed the Culdees, forcing them underground until the Scottish Reformation, when the Presbyterian Church restored Christianity to its original state.<sup>77</sup>

During the Napoleonic Wars, a Presbyterian minister named James Jamieson published *An Historical Account of the Ancient Culdees of Iona*, which depicted the Culdees as utopian exemplars of Presbyterian religion, who were destroyed by sinister Catholic infiltrators such as the Augustinian monks, forty years before James Begg's conspiracy of a worldwide Catholic conspiracy to rule the world appeared in print. He also claimed that elements of the Culdees survived after this suppression long enough to influence the Scottish Reformation, which restored Scottish Christianity to its original state.<sup>78</sup>

In the middle of the century, within the context of the No Popery movement, Reverend Dunan McCallum of Duirinish began enthusiastically promoting the notion that the Culdees were the first Presbyterians to resist Catholic incursions. In 1855, he published a study which claimed that the Culdees had first arrived in Britain in the late 2nd or early 3rd century, preached in vernacular languages instead of Latin, and had resisted the incursion of the

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<sup>75</sup> David Calderwood, *The true history of Church of Scotland, from the beginning of the Reformation unto the end of the reign of king James vi.* Edited by Thomas Thomson. Vol. 1. (Edinburgh, UK: Wodrow Society), 1843, 39.

<sup>76</sup> Calderwood, *True History*, 39-43.

<sup>77</sup> Bradley, *Celtic Christianity*, 112.

<sup>78</sup> Bradley, *Celtic Christianity*, 111.



Catholic Church.<sup>79</sup> To mark the tricentenary of the Scottish Reformation, McCallum also published a tract titled *The Church of Scotland as old as the Church of Rome*, which credited Saint Columba as founding the Presbyterian Church.<sup>80</sup> That same year, a contemporary of MacCallum, Congregationalist minister W.L. Alexander, delivered the first speech at the Scottish Reformation Society's meeting, asserting that if the Protestants were defined as opponents of the Catholic Church, then the Culdees must have been Protestant by their resistance to the imposition of continental norms in the 7th century.<sup>81</sup>

From 1870s, as anti-Catholic sentiment waned in public sentiments outside of extremist groups, histories regarding Celtic Christianity became less overly radical, and the most sectarian rhetoric regarding the Celtic Church disappeared. Nevertheless, most contemporary historians writing for a scholarly audience continued to take the basic tenets of the Proto-Protestant Thesis for granted. While they stayed away from the sectarian nationalist claims that the Celtic Church was Presbyterian in particular, historians such as the Historiographer-Royal William Skene, nevertheless emphasised its independence from the Catholic Church and its struggles with the latter.<sup>82</sup>

In the 20th century, as anti-Irish sentiment flared during World War I and its aftermath, a new controversy arose between the traditional "Gaelophiles", who attributed Scotland's conversion to Irish preachers like Columba, and the new Pictophiles, who downplayed the former and emphasised the role of Pictish Christians in converting Scottish pagans. The founder of the Pictophile school was Free Church minister Archibald Scott, who not only was

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<sup>79</sup> Bradley, *Celtic Christianity*, 128.

<sup>80</sup> Coleman, *Remembering the Past*, 99.

<sup>81</sup> Coleman, *Remembering the Past*, 208.

<sup>82</sup> Bradley, *Celtic Christianity*, 126-7.

antagonistic towards the Irish for their lack of support during World War I but whose own brother had died fighting the Dublin rebels of the Easter Rebellion. In his 1918 book *The Pictish Nation*, Scott emphasised the role of Pictish evangelists such as Saint Ninian, the first known missionary in Scotland, in converting the people to Christianity. He downplayed traditional figures of note, such as the Irish-born Columba. He emphasised the supposed independence of the Pictish church from Rome while depicting the Gaelic church of Columba as subordinate to the region's secular rulers.<sup>83</sup>

Returning to the sectarian nationalist rhetoric of historians like Jamieson and MacCallum, Scott praised the “devoted labours of the Pictish Celi De, who struggled to continue the Ancient Church”,<sup>84</sup> who were supposedly paragons of the evangelical Presbyterianism of the Free Church. According to Scott, the Celi De did not practice infant baptism, had no representation of Jesus on the Cross like Catholics, and staunchly opposed the episcopal organisation of the Roman Catholic Church. He contrasted the “the Roman Churchman with the imitated pomp and trappings of temporal power, whose aim is the aggrandizement of his Church” with the “Pictish Churchman.... clad in hooded cloak of brown coloured wool..., demanding a clean, honest, just and merciful life as the first condition of admission into the number of Christ's flock”,<sup>85</sup> and wrote:

The Church of the Picts stands in history as a branch of the Church of Christ which, adhering to the simple life and simple organization and government of the earliest

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<sup>83</sup> Bradley, *Celtic Christianity*, 174-6.

<sup>84</sup> Archibald Scott, *The Pictish Nation, Its People & Its Church* (Edinburgh, UK: T.N. Foulis, 1918), xii, quoted in Ian C. Bradley, *Celtic Christianity: Making Myths and Chasing Dreams* (Edinburgh, UK: Edinburgh University Press, 2019), 174-5.

<sup>85</sup> Scott, *Pictish Nation*, 526-7, in quoted in Bradley, *Celtic Christianity*, 176.

Apostolic Church, fitted itself into the national life of a free people who delighted to exercise a control in their own government and education.<sup>86</sup>

Although these authors drew on pre-nationalist writers such as David Calderwood to make their claims, their arguments attained a new significance in the age of nationalism. It was no longer sufficient for Celtic Christianity to be a separate denomination of Christianity and a precursor to Protestantism. Protestant writers in the 19<sup>th</sup> century argued that as the first Christians in Scotland, who opposed the Catholic Church, the Celtic Christians also must have been integral to the development of the Scottish nation. The Culdees, with their supposed democratic Presbyterian organisation, were believed to have laid the foundations for the self-defined “quintessentially Scottish traits” such as a love of liberty and hatred of foreign tyranny, whether it be in the form of the Catholic Church that tried to intrude on Scotland in the Early Middle Ages or the Catholic Church of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Even figures such as William Wallace and Robert the Bruce were said to have been influenced by the individualism of the Culdees.<sup>87</sup>

Before the publication of *The Pictish Nation*, Saint Columba was highly regarded by Scottish Nationalists as a proto-Presbyterian hero. Typical of these attitudes was the Free Church author Thomas M'Lauchlan, who published the *Early Scottish Church* in 1865, which church historian and specialist in Celtic Christian history Ian Bradley describes as “contrast[ing] 'the ambitious, grasping spirit' of Augustine and his companions, 'covetous of place and power', with the humility of Columba and the missionaries of Iona and Lindisfarne who were 'covetous of exalting Christ, but crucifying self'”.<sup>88</sup> In addition to the tracts

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<sup>86</sup> Bradley, *Celtic Christianity*, 174-6.

<sup>87</sup> Coleman, *Remembering the Past*, 98-99.

<sup>88</sup> Bradley, *Celtic Christianity*, 131.

published in the 1850s, Columba was widely commemorated in art of the time, such as *The Coming of Saint Columba* by William McTaggart. Many Scottish Christians widely celebrated the 1300th anniversary of his death in 1897.<sup>89</sup>

The commemoration of the Culdees and Saint Columba had a second dimension in the relationship of religion and nationalism as expounded by Brubaker. Not only do religiously based forms of nationalism exist, but nationalism itself can take on the trappings of religion, which can be aptly illustrated by the case of 19<sup>th</sup> century Scottish nationalism. Protestant nationalists created a mythology around founding figures such as Columba, the Culdees, and other members of the “Celtic Church” analogous to religious myths such as the book of Genesis. They explained the creation of the nation through the arrival of Celtic Christians, a dogma that Scotland was a nation of Protestant freedom-lovers, and expressed these myths through ritual, such as the commemoration of Columba’s death in 1897. In this manner, nationalism and religion are intertwined with religion being part of the definition of nationhood but by nationalism becoming a phenomenon connected with but never entirely separate from religion.<sup>90</sup>

However, this “founding myth” of a Presbyterian Celtic Church not only served to define Scottish nationhood in positive terms, such as the equation of Scotland and Presbyterianism. It also defined Scottish nationhood in negative terms, creating an opposition to Scotland and Presbyterianism in one hand, and Ireland and Catholicism on the other. In this founding myth of the Celtic Church, the bringing in a line of Scottish Christians with continental forms of Christianity was seen as the beginning of a dark age imposed by foreigners such as Augustine of Canterbury, who was regularly depicted as a sinister agent of

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<sup>89</sup> Bradley, *Celtic Christianity*, 148-9.

<sup>90</sup> Brubaker, “Religion and Nationalism”, 3.

the Papacy as early as David Calderwood's publications in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. To this end, Scottish nationalists in the 19th century regularly used the imagery of the "Celtic Church" in anti-Catholic propaganda. In addition to being a tool to unite, this myth of a Presbyterian Celtic Church also served to divide, excluding Catholics in Scotland, such as the recent immigrants from Ireland, from Scottish nationhood.

## Malcolm Hay and *A Chain of Error*

## Biography of Malcolm Hay

Into this atmosphere of Presbyterian-driven Scottish nationalism stepped Malcolm Vivian Hay of Seaton, whose work *A Chain of Error in Scottish History* would spark a controversy over the relationship between Celtic Christianity and the Roman Catholic Church. It is difficult to write a proper biography of Hay due to the paucity of sources on his life, which is unusual for somebody who was leader of an organisation as prominent as the British War Office's cryptography department during the First World War. The document for which we have the most information of him is the biography by his widow, Alice Ivy-Hay, *Valiant for Truth* (1971), which is highly subjective and biased in many places. If the biography can be taken at face value, this lack of biographical data may stem from his lack of connections and "old boy" networks: Hay was apparently educated in smaller Catholic schools instead of more prestigious and Church of England schools where many members of Britain's elite went and socialised, while much of his time in his twenties were spent travelling abroad as opposed to socialising in universities and other public places in Britain; leading to a lack of British authors who may have written about him. What follows is an attempt to surmise Hay's life from the sources available at the time of this writing.

Hay was born into a landed family then resident south of London in 1881, and that originated from Aberdeenshire. His father, James Gordon Hay was a lawyer, and his grandfather, Lord James Hay, was a general who had served in the Napoleonic Wars who in turn was the second son of George Hay, 7th Marquess of Tweeddale. However, as descendants of a younger son of a Marquess, the Hays of Seaton were not members of the peerage. His mother, Mary Catherine Cox, was a Catholic heiress who raised her children as Catholics, which would be pivotal to their later lives. At the age of one, his elder brother died, and

followed shortly by his 67-year-old father, leaving Malcolm the nominal head of the Hays of Seaton. Malcolm and his brother attended an English grammar school, Saint Basil's in West Hampstead, shortly after their father's death. In 1892, his aunt and guardian sent them to a Jesuit school, St John's Beaumont near Windsor. The Hays of Seaton also visited the family estate of Seaton House during school holidays. Hay was typical of other members of the Victorian upper classes in receiving a liberal arts education from these schools, studying classical subjects such as Greek and Latin, but he became especially interested in history. He was also drawn to other languages, such as French and Italian, which would aid his research.<sup>91</sup>

The choice of the Hays' grammar schools is unusual. He did not go to Eton or any of the other prestigious grammar schools most upper-class British boys would have attended during this period, but instead attended smaller Catholic schools. This is particularly striking, as according to an obituary published in the *Law Times*, their father James Gordon Hay did attend Eton as a boy.<sup>92</sup> From the limited biographical information available, there is no indication that the Hays of Seaton suffered any financial hardship during Malcolm's childhood. However, St Basil's School was a school that specifically catered to the sons of Catholic gentry,<sup>93</sup> while St John's Beaumont School was, as noted above, run by the Jesuits. With the evidence available, the likeliest explanation for this upbringing was that Cox wished for her children to be educated at specifically Catholic institutions.

Hay did not go to university but spent much of his time as a young man in France, where his aunt lived. This move was against his father's legal will, and while Georgina Hay

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<sup>91</sup> Alice Ivy Hay, *Valiant for Truth: Malcolm Hay of Seaton* (London, UK: Spearman, 1971), 21-41.

<sup>92</sup> "James Gordon Hay, Esq.," *The Law Times* 74 (February 17, 1883): 289.

<sup>93</sup> Thomas J. Barratt, *The Annals of Hampstead* (London, UK: A. and C. Black, 1912), 350.



kept him for several years in England, they were sent to his other aunt's estates in Vouzan over her concerns for his health. Although he would marry his cousin Florence in France, he was unhappy with the country and travelled abroad to Italy, where he also learned mediaeval Italian, and then to Somalia. In 1907, he returned to Scotland to take control of his late father's estates. Hay lived a life of aristocratic leisure, alternating between studying, travelling, and sports. He also became involved in politics in the immediate years before World War I as a member of the Liberal Party, making speeches on social issues and becoming a prolific writer who published many letters and articles in local newspapers, magazines, and journals. He was an outspoken advocate for Catholic rights across the British Empire. He wrote articles supporting the interests of the Catholic Church in Quebec, which still dominated civil society and the government at the time.<sup>94</sup> He also became interested in autonomy for Scotland as well.<sup>95</sup>

At the outbreak of the First World War he was transferred to the regular First Battalion from his peacetime Territorial (militia) battalion and was shipped to Belgium. During the Battle of Mons he was badly wounded in the head and became paralysed down his entire left side. He was subsequently taken prisoner by the Germans. In early 1915, Hay was released during a prisoner exchange following the intervention of the Princess of Blücher, to whom he was distantly related, and it was upon his return to Britain that he subsequently recovered the use of his left side. In 1916, he published *Wounded and a Prisoner of War*, his first book, based on his experiences.<sup>96</sup> At the end of 1915, Hay became leader of MII(b), a then-small

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<sup>94</sup> John Alexander Dickinson, *A Short History of Quebec* (Montreal, QC: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2009), 242-3.

<sup>95</sup> Hay, *Valiant for Truth*, 42-53.

<sup>96</sup> Hay, *Valiant for Truth*, 53-58.

cryptological department of the British War Office. According to Alice Ivy Hay, it was Malcolm's proficiency in several languages, including German, that led to his appointment, despite being relatively junior.<sup>97</sup> He oversaw its expansion from seven military officers to a large formation of 85 cryptologists from diverse variety of backgrounds including fellow linguists. Although they did involve themselves deciphering German military ciphers, this was not their primary focus. Instead, MI1(b) was tasked with intercepting intelligence from neutral countries that could be forwarded to the Central Powers, while its wireless sub-department MI1(e) focused on decrypting German air force signals that could signal aerial attacks on Britain.<sup>98</sup>

After the war, Hay resumed his life of leisurely study, dividing his time between Aberdeenshire and London, and when in London he spent many hours studying in the British Library. Hay also befriended the Bishop of Aberdeen, who allowed Hay access to the extensive archive of historical documents relating to Catholicism at the Aberdeenshire grammar school of Blairs College, which he catalogued and published in 1929. Not only would he draw from these documents when writing *A Chain of Error*, but they also formed the basis for many other historical works he published during this period.<sup>99</sup>

These sources culminated with the *A Chain of Error in Scottish History* in the latter half of 1927, which was the most controversial of his works. The next book published by Hay was *The Blairs Papers* in 1929, a collection of primary sources relating to Catholic history found in the archive of Blairs College. In the 1930s, Hay published several more books on the

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<sup>97</sup> Hay, *Valiant for Truth*, 58.

<sup>98</sup> Jim Beach, *Haig's Intelligence: GHQ and the German Army, 1916-1918*, (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2013), [https://www.google.ca/books/edition/Haig\\_s\\_Intelligence/RRShAQAAQBAJ?hl=en&gbpv=0](https://www.google.ca/books/edition/Haig_s_Intelligence/RRShAQAAQBAJ?hl=en&gbpv=0), 156.

<sup>99</sup> Williamson, *Catholic Intellectual Life*, 180.

history of British Catholicism: the first was *The Jesuits and the Popish Plot* (1934), which centred around an incident in 1679 where five Jesuit priests were executed for supposedly plotting against the British government. The second was *Winston Churchill and James II*, on the eponymous 17<sup>th</sup> century politician Winston Churchill (who was an ancestor and namesake of the 20<sup>th</sup> century Prime Minister). The third was *The Enigma of James II* (1938), concerning the eponymous last Catholic monarch of the British Isles, who was deposed in the Glorious Revolution of 1688.<sup>100</sup> In 1931, Hay had a private audience to Pope Pius XI while visiting Rome, to whom Hay presented several of his books.<sup>101</sup>

Hay also contributed to Catholic newspapers, such as *G.K.'s Weekly*, a distributist paper run by another prominent British Catholic intellectual, G.K. Chesterton.<sup>102</sup> Distributism is a political ideology calling for an economy run by small landowners which was officially endorsed in Papal encyclicals, and therefore by Catholics such as Hay and Chesterton.<sup>103</sup> Another prominent Roman Catholic distributist who contributed to *G.K.'s Weekly*, the Franco-British author Hillaire Belloc, became a close friend and correspondent of Hay. The University of Aberdeen features in its collection of Hay's papers many letters between the two from 1928 to 1940.<sup>104</sup>

Unlike Chesterton or Belloc, who were both anti-Semitic, Malcolm Hay became a philosemite and Zionist from the Second World War onwards. At the beginning of the war,

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<sup>100</sup> Hay, *Valiant for Truth*, 90-97.

<sup>101</sup> Hay, *Valiant for Truth*, 92-6.

<sup>102</sup> Bruce Williamson, *Catholic Intellectual Life*, 180.

<sup>103</sup> Prentiss, Craig. *Debating God's Economy: Social Justice in America on the Eve of Vatican II*. (United Kingdom: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2010), 43-6.

<sup>104</sup> "Papers of Malcolm Vivian Hay of Seaton," Archives Hub, accessed January 31, 2024, <https://archiveshub.jisc.ac.uk/search/archives/f0d7f22e-9245-330c-b53d-3d3c89dfa16b>.

Hay, who himself was taken prisoner by the Germans in the First World War, organised efforts by the Red Cross in Aberdeenshire to send relief parcels to Scottish prisoners of war in Germany. He also edited a monthly periodical intended to be sent along with these packages to British prisoners of war in Axis countries. It was through these relief efforts to German POWs that he met his second wife and future biographer, Alice Ivy Hay (then known as Paterson), whom he married in 1956. She in turn knew several prominent Zionists, such as Chaim Weizmann, the future first President of Israel.<sup>105</sup>

Although it is difficult to establish a formal chain of events, it appears likely that it was from these contacts with Jewish intellectuals (if Alice Ivy-Hay's claims can be taken at face value), and from receiving news on the extent of the Holocaust that Hay became interested in Zionism and Jewish studies after the war. The couple travelled to Palestine, and Malcolm published *The Foot of Pride* (retitled *Europe and the Jews* during the print of its second edition 1960), a history of anti-Semitism in Europe, in 1950.<sup>106</sup> During the late 1940s, Hay also corresponded with Weizmann. Several letters from both the Hays appear in Weizmann's collection of correspondence published by Barnet Litvinoff.<sup>107</sup> Malcolm and Alice also travelled to Israel in 1949 and made several visits to the United States and Belgium in 1950.

Seaton House was sold in 1946 to pay off an inheritance tax. Malcolm initially continued to live in Seaton House as a life tenant. However, after marrying Alice Ivy Hay after the death of her first husband in 1956, Malcolm subsequently lived with her instead, continuing their travels together. Malcolm also became a member of the Knights of Malta

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<sup>105</sup> Hay, *Valiant for Truth*, 130-6.

<sup>106</sup> Hay, *Valiant for Truth*, 143-4.

<sup>107</sup> Chaim Weizmann, *The Letters and Papers of Chaim Weizmann*, ed. Barnet Litvinoff, vol. 22 (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Books, 1979), 95-6.

and aided in the funding of a nursing home built by the order in Aberdeen. In 1962, he published his last book, *The Prejudices of Pascal: Concerning in Particular the Jesuit Order and the Jewish People*. It was during this year that Malcolm developed an illness of the prostate gland, and despite receiving surgery, his condition continued to deteriorate, and he died on 27 December of that year. He is buried in the graveyard of St Machar's Cathedral which is adjacent to the site of Seaton House. The mansion, which was abandoned in 1956 when Malcolm moved out, burned down in 1963 and is now marked by a fountain at Seaton Park in Aberdeen, which was formerly his private gardens.<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>108</sup> Alice Ivy Hay, *Valiant for Truth*, 167-74; 174-5; 185-6.

## Summary of *A Chain of Error in Scottish History*

Much of *A Chain of Error* is a sustained critique of the pro-Protestant biases that marked Scottish and broader British scholarship, tracing them as far back as the German Reformation and the first Protestant writers. Numerous other writers between the 1500s and 1927, the time of its publication, are also cited. It is beyond the scope of this paper to determine how significant every historian Hay wrote of across all these time periods in the historiography of Celtic Christianity, even those he cites in multiple sections, such as William Skene. The majority of these historians' work have been superseded by those of late 20<sup>th</sup> century authors such as Ian Bradley and Donald Meek. It is also very difficult to assess the factuality of every argument Hay made with the resources available to the author of this paper. However, where possible the careers of the historians cited by Hay will be discussed to assess their relative importance at the time of publication, as will the findings of later scholars on the topics brought up in *A Chain of Error*. In this light, it is best to regard *A Chain of Error in Scottish History* as a primary document on the state of Scottish church historiography at the time of the book's publication, one that was influenced by the attitudes and biases of the author. What follows is a summary of the book's major points.

In the first chapter, Hay wrote that history was the primary propaganda tool used by the reformers to appeal to "the ignorant mob", quoting Martin Luther and other historians. The most significant example of anti-Catholic propaganda he cited was the *History of the Christian Church*, published in 1559 in Magdeburg, which he described as "a collection of scandals and calumnies designed to prove that the whole body of Catholics was, and had always been, the foulest of the human species, that 'the mark of the Beast was branded on

their foreheads”.<sup>109</sup> It featured propagandistic narratives such as Pope Joan (a woman who supposedly disguised herself as a man to become pope) and “the still more ridiculous tale of the 6000 children's heads said to have been found in the fishpond of a nunnery in the days of Gregory I.”<sup>110</sup> To that end, he begrudgingly and partially credited the origins of the modern historical method to the circle of Protestant scholars who published the world, the Magdeburg Centuriators, who embarked on organised searches of historical archives to find scandals in the Catholic Church to use as propaganda. Hay also lamented the then-underrated role of Catholic scholars such as Caesar Baronius, who “lifted history entirely out of the polemics” in the development of modern historiography, but were supposedly ignored by Protestant historians in Britain, who preferred to publish anti-Catholic polemics.<sup>111</sup> Baronius published his history of the Catholic Church, the *Annales*, in response to the Centuriators, which Hay claimed was praised by contemporaries for its non-partisan nature (despite Baronius being a Catholic, he did not attempt to write a polemic like the *History of the Christian Church*), its deep and comprehensive treatment of the subject and especially is a long list of cited sources.<sup>112</sup>

Hay additionally accused various historians such as John Mills and Edward Gibbon of bias and poor scholarship.<sup>113</sup> The former is an obscure figure who is not mentioned anywhere else besides his authorship of the 1757 *History of the Popes*, from which Hay cites the following passage, but is otherwise largely unknown to the reading public. Nevertheless,

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<sup>109</sup> Malcolm Vivian Hay, *A Chain of Error in Scottish History* (London, UK: Longmans, Green and Co., 1927), 3-4.

<sup>110</sup> Hay, *Chain of Error*, 4.

<sup>111</sup> Hay *Chain of Error*, 6.

<sup>112</sup> Hay, *Chain of Error*, 1-6.

<sup>113</sup> Hay, *Chain of Error*, 10.

William Thomas Lowndes' *British Librarian*, published in 1839, independently attests to the book's existence.<sup>114</sup>

I have no interest to praise or blame the See of Rome... Avarice, ambition, sacrilege, perjury, an absolute contempt of everything sacred, the most amazing dissoluteness, every species of debauchery in excess, a total depravity and corruption of doctrine and morals, characterise the history of the Popes. Such instances are highly disagreeable...<sup>115</sup>

Regarding the latter, the focus of Chapter 2, Hay noted that much of Gibbon's works on the Catholic Church were not based on primary sources written by contemporary writers such as Saint Augustine, but secondary sources edited by Protestant writers such as the Episcopal Bishop James Ussher. In fact, according to Hay, contemporary critics praised Gibbon for his refusal to examine the sources, which Gibbon himself described as "the rubbish of the Dark Ages" that Ussher and other writers had "salvaged". Hay quoted 19<sup>th</sup>-century critic and legal scholar Sir James Fitzjames Stephen in saying this selective treatment of sources, "only showed that Gibbon possessed one of the most valuable gifts that a historian can possess, the gift of forming a sound judgement as to the value of his authorities."<sup>116</sup> Despite critics like William Makepeace Thackeray praising the sources as "having it written on the Dome of St. Peter's",<sup>117</sup> Hay himself took a much more critical eye to Gibbon's sources, describing them as "men whose work has never deserved the name of history and could no more become out

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<sup>114</sup> William Thomas Lowndes, *Lowndes' British Librarian, Or Book-Collector's Guide to the Formation of a Library in All Branches of Literature, Science, and Art*, vol. ii, of *Class I* (London, UK: Whitaker and Co., 1839), 1303.

<sup>115</sup> Hay, *Chain of Error*, 10.

<sup>116</sup> Hay, *Chain of Error*, 12-13.

<sup>117</sup> Hay, *Chain of Error*, 13.



of date than ' Gulliver's Travels' or ' Robinson Crusoe,'" and that had 19th century historians read through Gibbon's works and judged for themselves, they would have known this fact. Instead, according to Hay, they read Gibbon uncritically, treating him as "an authority second only to the Bible" and unthinkingly copying his claims.<sup>118</sup> This uncritical copying of biased sources is a significant theme in later parts of Hay's work and is the eponymous "Chain of Error" in Hay's title.

Hay then turned his history of Protestant scholarly misrepresentation to Scotland, which he lamented lacked a genius historian. He partially blamed the situation on John Knox's Protestant reforms, which Hay alleged resulted in the mental energy of Scottish scholars becoming wasted on anti-Catholic polemics. According to Hay, other reforms such as the abolition of Latin and ritual in liturgy created an artistic and intellectual loss that cut Scotland off from intellectual circles in Europe and thus undermined the humanities. According to Hay, when the Scottish intellectual world recovered from the upheavals of the Reformation, the process was slow and piecemeal, and the study of history took even longer to recover.<sup>119</sup> Hay also made similar arguments to those in *A Chain of Error* in an article written for the *Glasgow Observer*, "How Knox Ruined Education in Scotland" that was also reprinted in the *Nottingham Midland Catholic News* on 18 November 1933.<sup>120</sup>

Nevertheless, it must also be noted that narratives contrary to Hay's appeared very soon after the publication of *A Chain of Error*. In 1935, American historian Samuel Elliot Morison had argued the opposite point in his survey of 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> century European universities in

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<sup>118</sup> Hay, *Chain of Error*, 7-20.

<sup>119</sup> Hay, *Chain of Error*, 13-14.

<sup>120</sup> Malcolm Vivian Hay, "How Knox Ruined Education in Scotland," *Midland Catholic News*, November 18, 1933.

*The Founding of Harvard*, though Hay and his claims are not mentioned specifically.

Morison wrote that before the Reformation, Scottish universities were very small institutions that taught only Latin translations of Aristotle. During the Scottish Reformation Andrew Melville extensively restructured the Scottish education system after studying at the Geneva Academy, introducing topics like Greek, Hebrew, geography and mathematics into the Scottish university curricula.<sup>121</sup> The role of Melville in reforming Scottish education along humanist lines, as opposed to Hay's narrative of a decline in learning after the Reformation, is affirmed by modern academic sources such as the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. As General Moderator of the National Kirk after the death of John Knox, Andrew Melville was also the one who formally abolished dioceses in Scotland and replaced them with Presbyterian organisation; it was this advocate of Presbyterianism which led to his permanent exile to France by James VI and I, where Melville died in 1622.<sup>122</sup>

Another reason for this lack of solid historical scholarship, Hay claimed, was the dismissing out of hand of Catholic scholars, such as members of the Jesuit orders, as “scheming purveyors of superstition and fables”.<sup>123</sup> Among the wilfully ignorant errors Hay accused Scottish historians of were systemically interpreting for generations the Latin word “Scotus” as always meaning “Scottish”, when in fact it could also mean “Irish” in the early Middle Ages— a misreading, which, as noted above was crucial for specific interpretations of the Proto-Protestant Thesis, especially when it came to arguing that Scotland was the true

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<sup>121</sup> Samuel Eliot Morison, *The Founding of Harvard College* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1935), 131-4.

<sup>122</sup> James Kirk. (2004). Melville, Andrew. In *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/18543>

<sup>123</sup> Hay, *Chain of Error*, 33-4.

home of Christianity in the British Isles.<sup>124</sup> That historians such as Buchanan misinterpreted the meaning of Scotia was also noted by John Duke in his book *The Columban Church*, which was quoted by Donald Meek in his work *The Quest for Celtic Christianity* in 2000.<sup>125</sup> Ian Bradley, writing in 1999, also commented on the misconception.<sup>126</sup>

Hay additionally wrote that there were few Scottish historians in the 18th century of note. The first was Thomas Innes, a Catholic priest educated in France who wrote the 1729 *Essay on the Ancient Inhabitants of Scotland and the Civil and Ecclesiastical History*, which was only published posthumously in 1853. However, Hay claimed that Innes' scholarship, upon which he heaped high praise, was forgotten even by Catholics.<sup>127</sup> The second was James Macpherson, a Scottish Highland antiquarian, poet, and historian most infamous for his forgeries of Gaelic poetry under titles such as *Fragments of Ancient Poetry and Fingal*.<sup>128</sup> Hay described him, and the similarly named but unrelated John MacPherson, as "ignorant and foolish to a degree not often reached in Scotland or any country at any period of history," whose infamy was not from their learnedness or erudition, but from the hoaxes and falsehoods they perpetuated.<sup>129</sup> According to Hay, James Macpherson's historical works, such as *An Introduction to the History of Great Britain and Ireland*, were plagiarised from previous writers such as John MacPherson. Hay noted the influence of MacPherson on

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<sup>124</sup> Hay, *Chain of Error*, 32-6.

<sup>125</sup> John A. Duke, *The Columban Church* (London, UK: Oxford University Press, 1932), 155-6, quoted in Donald E. Meek, *The Quest for Celtic Christianity* (Edinburgh, UK: Handsel Press, 2000), 112-13.

<sup>126</sup> Bradley, *Celtic Christianity*, 96.

<sup>127</sup> Malcolm Hay, *Chain of Error*, 35-6.

<sup>128</sup> Derick S. Thomson, "Macpherson, James (1736–1796), Writer," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, September 23, 2004, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/17728>.

<sup>129</sup> Malcolm Hay, *Chain of Error*, 37.

Edward Gibbon, who incorporated MacPherson's claims that the Scots were indigenous to Britain, and that this supposed truth was later suppressed by the Irish, into his works.<sup>130</sup>

Modern scholarship treats James Macpherson as a strongly controversial figure; controversies which began almost from the publication of his first alleged translation in 1760. According to the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, although he did draw on authentic Gaelic ballads, they were heavily edited to produce a final product mostly of his imagining.<sup>131</sup> Writing about James MacPherson's history publications, Mairi MacPherson, writing in 2023, does not agree with Hay's views of the former MacPherson as "ignorant and foolish". Rather, she placed the writer in the context of historiography and scholarship in the 18<sup>th</sup> century British Empire, arguing that as a historian he did much to engage with methods and concepts common to Enlightenment-era historiography. She also emphasised James' role in legitimatising the British Empire through his histories, arguing that Scottish Highlanders played an important role in Britain's past, present, and future. Mairi also emphasised James' work as a colonial secretary in West Florida and the role of his friend John MacPherson as acting Governor-General of India from 1785-6.<sup>132</sup>

Hay also accused Sir Walter Scott of spreading anti-Catholic propaganda in *Tales of a Grandfather*, quoting extensive sections where Scott claimed that the Catholic Church taught relics had inherently supernatural powers and that they banned laypeople from reading the Bible, sections which include phrases such as "The Popes ... went on, by degrees, introducing

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<sup>130</sup> Hay, *Chain of Error*, 38.

<sup>131</sup> Thomson, "Macpherson"

<sup>132</sup> Mairi MacPherson and Jim MacPherson, *Macpherson the Historian: History Writing, Empire and Enlightenment in the Works of James Macpherson, De Gruyter* (Edinburgh, UK: Edinburgh University Press, 2023), <https://www-degruyter-com.myaccess.library.utoronto.ca/document/doi/10.1515/9781474411172/html#contents>, 2-4.

into the simple and beautiful system delivered to us in the gospel, other doctrines, many of them inconsistent with, or contradictory of, pure Christianity”.<sup>133</sup> Although Hay acknowledged these claims were partially based on fact, such as the corruption scandals around the monetary indulgences, he cited extensive examples of how Scott had exaggerated many of the claims. Hay went on to argue that the Catholic Church had always taught that relics are only miraculous owing to the power of God working through them and that Scott had exaggerated the extent by which indulgences were abused. Hay continued to write that while *Tales* was writing for children, the wide circulation of his claims meant that they were believed by a massive audience, not only in Scotland but in the rest of the English-speaking world, and that no writer had ever made public refutation of the claims in the book.<sup>134</sup> As a result of centuries of anti-Catholic Propaganda, Hay concluded that British people in the 19th century had lost an accurate understanding of their past, history had been replaced with polemics and wishful thinking, writing, “Exactly how much a country loses when, through the extensive neglect of rational historical study, contact with the past has been severed, cannot easily be estimated.”<sup>135</sup>

Modern scholarship around Walter Scott’s relationship to Catholicism has focused on his personal opinion of it, and not the impact he had on the public, unfortunately making it difficult to assess Hay’s claims. However, they do paint a more complex view of Walter Scott’s views towards Catholicism than what Hay alleged. The *Edinburgh Companion to*

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<sup>133</sup> Walter Scott, *Tales of a Grandfather: Being Stories Taken From Scottish History* (Edinburgh, UK: Adam and Charles Black, 1869), 97-9, quoted in Malcolm Vivian Hay, *A Chain of Error in Scottish History* (London, UKA: Longmans, Green and Co., 1927), 43-5..

<sup>134</sup> Hay, *Chain of Error*, 41-8.

<sup>135</sup> Hay, *Chain of Error*, 34-46.

Walter Scott, referenced the *Tales of a Grandfather* as describing “the Reformation from a Protestant point of view but without acrimony”. Compared to other writers at the time, Scott’s description of medieval monks in *Tales* was even-handed by the standards of the day, quoting a section of the text: “Though there continued to be amongst the monks many good, pious and learned men, idleness and luxury invaded many of the institutions, and corrupted both their doctrines and their morals... [they] departed from the simplicity of their order.”<sup>136</sup> Michael E. Schiefelbein, writing in 2000, quoted strongly anti-Catholic opinions from Scott’s diary but also noted that he reluctantly supported Catholic emancipation in 1829.<sup>137</sup>

Starting in Chapter IV, Hay discussed misrepresentations of early Scottish church history and these form the core of his work. These sections also received the most attention from subsequent historians, including reviewers. The most significant of his attacks revolved around the Proto-Protestant Thesis. According to him, all these writers whom he targeted for criticism took the existence of a separate Celtic Church (or Scottish Church as Hay referred to it) for granted and wrote their histories around this hypothesis. Instead of examining the primary sources and basing their arguments around them, Hay charged them with taking the Proto-Protestant Thesis as their starting point and cherry-picking and systemically misrepresenting the evidence to support their case.

Hay specifically accused authors such as William Forbes Skene of the above, or of using sophisms to suggest the question of the Celtic Church and its relationship to its

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<sup>136</sup> Fiona Robertson, ed., *The Edinburgh Companion to Sir Walter Scott* (Edinburgh, UK: Edinburgh University Press, 2012), 85-6.

<sup>137</sup> Michael E. Schiefelbein, *The Lure of Babylon: Seven Protestant Novelists and Britain’s Roman Catholic Revival* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2001), 15-16.

continental equivalents were unsolvable.<sup>138</sup> William Forbes Skene was a historian who specialised in early Scottish and Celtic studies and was named Historiographer Royal of Scotland for his research in 1881. Hay also accused other writers of using false sense of impartiality by stating the Celtic Church did not conform to any denomination in the modern sense, such as John Mackintosh, whom Hay quoted as saying:

In vain have contending parties striven to show that [the form of Christianity in Scotland] was Roman, Episcopal, or Presbyterial; it was neither the one nor the other [sic], as they are understood and fixed in the creeds and polities of modern times.<sup>139</sup>

Hay held that Mackintosh dodged the actual question of the relationship between the Scottish Church and its equivalents on the continent, regardless of any actual or imagined connection it had with a modern denomination(s). The true question, Hay claimed, was whether the Scottish Church considered itself independent or as part of a wider Christian church nominally centred on Rome.

Hay devoted the remainder of Chapter IV to criticism of three authors whom he singled out for both their prominence in the historiography of Celtic Christianity and for their biases and failures of historical research. The first was John Pryce (1828-1903), the Dean of Bangor Cathedral in Wales and an ecclesiastical historian, who published works such as the *History of the British Church* and *The Ancient British Church*.<sup>140</sup> The second was George Grub (1812–1892). Grub was a Scottish Episcopal historian from Aberdeen. who specialised in

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<sup>138</sup> A. J. G. Mackay, "Skene, William Forbe," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, September 28, 2006, <https://www.oxforddnb.com/display/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-25671>.

<sup>139</sup> Hay, *Chain of Error*, 54-55.

<sup>140</sup> "Pryce, John (1828-1903), Dean of Bangor," *Dictionary of Welsh Biography*, 1959, <https://biography.wales/article/s-PRYC-JOH-1828>.

ecclesiastical history. He was the author of *An Ecclesiastical History of Scotland*.<sup>141</sup> The last was John Hill Burton (1809–1881), another native of Aberdeen who wrote on various topics, including philosophy, economic, and political history. He was appointed Historiographer-Royal of Scotland in 1867.<sup>142</sup> His work, the *History of Scotland*, is quoted throughout Hay's text.

Hay first attacked what he claimed was the bias of Pryce and Grub against the mediaeval biographers of the early Scottish saints Ninian and Kentigern. The two historians accused the biographers of presentism when they described the saints as representing Rome as the seat of the universal Christian Church, and that the saints would not have made such claims when they were alive. To refute Pryce and Grub's claims, Hay quoted several early church leaders in the British Isles and elsewhere who made similar statements: first during the First Council of Arles in 314, second in the History of the African Persecutions by the African Victor Vitensis in the 5th century, and finally in a letter written by the Irish Abbot Cummian to the Pope in the 7th century. After looking through this evidence, Hay concluded that "It is also quite clear that Pryce and Grub, and probably most of their readers and pupils, held the strange principle, which no text, however authentic, was allowed to contradict, that

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<sup>141</sup> James Cooper, "Grub, George (1812–1892), Ecclesiastical Historian," ed. G. Martin Murphy, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, September 28, 2006, <https://www.oxforddnb.com/display/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-11691>.

<sup>142</sup> Michael Fry, "Burton, John Hill (1809–1881), Historian and Political Economist," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, May 26, 2016, <https://www.oxforddnb.com/display/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-4135?rskey=WKZjbY&result=1>.



the inhabitants of these islands, in the fifth and sixth centuries, looked at the See of Rome through post-Reformation spectacles.”<sup>143</sup>

Hay’s polemics continued with Hill Burton. He quoted Hill Burton as dismissing out of hand the reliability of mediaeval church historians, because “The ecclesiastic had to obey the Church, and if the Church told him that such things were of old, he must believe accordingly” and that “one cannot trust the ecclesiastical historians as correctly rendering events removed to any distance back from their age”.<sup>144</sup> To this, Hay added his maxim, “History is not a question of trust, but of proof.”<sup>145</sup> One must be aware of authorial biases when looking at past documents, he continued, but just because the writers of such early sources were biased does not mean they should be dismissed out of hand. Instead, they invite the historian to examine a text more closely to see what is and isn’t reliable evidence from a critical historical perspective.<sup>146</sup> Hay examined the history of claims regarding the Culdees, conceding that they were ascetics but that they only appeared towards the end of the Early Middle Ages, and reviewed the long history of Protestant propaganda in Scotland of claiming that the “Culdee Church” was the forerunner of the modern Kirk.<sup>147</sup>

However, the most significant misrepresentation in Hay’s opinion was the selective reading of Columbanus in his letter to Pope Gregory I by Protestant historians, where he called the latter a “living dog” during the controversy over the correct observance of Easter in the 660s. Its significance merits the extract from Columbanus to be quoted in full:

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<sup>143</sup> Hay, *Chain of Error*, 56-60.

<sup>144</sup> John Hill Burton, *The History of Scotland*, vol. i (Edinburgh and London, UK: William Blackwood and Sons, 1876), 245, quoted in Malcolm Vivian Hay, *A Chain of Error in Scottish History* (London, UKA: Longmans, Green and Co., 1927), 65.

<sup>145</sup> Hay, *Chain of Error*, 65.

<sup>146</sup> Hay, *Chain of Error*, 64-66.

<sup>147</sup> Hay, *Chain of Error*, 73-76.

How is it that you with all your wisdom . . . are induced to support this dark paschal system I wonder, I confess, that the erroneous practice of Gaul has not been long since abolished by you. You are afraid, perhaps, of incurring the charge of a taste for novelty and are content with the authority of your predecessors, and of Pope Leo in particular. But do not, I beseech you, in a matter of such importance give way to the dictates of humility or gravity only, as they are often mistaken. **It may be that in this affair a living dog is better than a dead lion.** [emphasis added] For a living saint may correct the errors that have not been corrected by another greater one.<sup>148</sup>

However, Hay charged his contemporaries with only ever reproducing the part of the passage highlighted in bold. This [mis]quote seemingly gave irrefutable proof that British church leaders (particularly Scottish ones) were staunchly opposed to their Roman equivalents and that a separate Celtic Church did exist. Hay accused his contemporaries of only ever quoting the Living Dog out of context as an anti-Papal polemic.

One author whom Hay accused of selectively and misleadingly quoting Columbanus was Dr. George Thomas Stokes, Professor of Church History at Trinity College, Dublin. Hay quoted Stokes in the 1889 *Ireland and the Celtic Church* as arguing that the letter was proof of the Celtic Church's independence from Rome, with the latter writing "I do not think that the reverence of Columbanus for the Pope, or his belief in papal infallibility, can have been very great when he could use such language."<sup>149</sup>

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<sup>148</sup> Hay, *Chain of Error*, 82-3.

<sup>149</sup> George T. Stokes, *Ireland and the Celtic Church* (London, UK: Hodder and Stoughton, 1886), 148, quoted in Malcolm Vivian Hay, *A Chain of Error in Scottish History* (London, UKA: Longmans, Green and Co., 1927), 83-6.

In Chapter VI, which is a continuation of Chapter V, Hay also traced one “chain of error” from early 19<sup>th</sup> century German historian J. A. W. Neander, who quoted the “living dog” to another writer of the time, J.C. Robertson, who published *Growth of Papal Power* in 1876 and quoted the “living dog”, who in turn was quoted by one W. Stephen in the 1894-5 *History of the Scottish Church*. Other historians who used the “living dog” according to Hay were F. Dudden, author of *Life of Gregory the Great*, and Arthur West Haddan.<sup>150</sup> Haddan was an Anglican church historian at the University of Cambridge.<sup>151</sup> In turn, Hay devoted large parts of these two chapters to showing how historians misquoting Columbanus were in turn copied uncritically by writers of popular literature who were not writing for an audience of university scholars or antiquarians.

Unfortunately for future historians, Hay did not give any examples of the popular literature which he claimed had misquoted Columbanus. In the bibliography at the beginning of the book, he wrote that he had “omitted to mention books that are wholly illiterate, and those professedly controversial” and that he would limit himself to citing academic works only.<sup>152</sup> Not only would this weaken his arguments when writing about popular literature, as above, it also robs historians of an opportunity to use *A Chain of Error* as a sourcebook to find popular works on religious history.

Hay noted several problems with the claims of Stokes and other writers whom he specifically cited. According to Hay, the phrase “a living dog is better than a dead lion” was a

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<sup>150</sup> Hay, *Chain of Error*, 86-7.

<sup>151</sup> William Hunt and Myfanwy Lloyd, “Haddan, Arthur West (1816–1873), Ecclesiastical Historian,” *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, September 23, 2004, <https://www.oxforddnb.com/display/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-11845>.

<sup>152</sup> Hay, *Chain of Error*, xvi.

play on words, as Gregory succeeded Pope Leo (or Lion). Columbanus himself asked for other Popes' approval for the Easter dating, writing to Gregory's successor Sabian over whether the obsolete method of calculating Easter was "not contrary to the faith", and advising Pope Gregory IV that he should "not despise this little piece of advice given by a foreigner, for you have taught him and it is your cause that he is championing", essentially stating that he saw himself as a servant of the Pope, not the enemy.<sup>153</sup>

Second, he defended Columbus by claiming that the language used by Columbanus, while caustic by modern standards, was not out of the ordinary by mediaeval standards, claiming that before the Reformation such rhetoric was tolerated because they were seen as attacks on the individual Pope, not the office of the Papacy. He quoted similar language used by the 11<sup>th</sup>-century St. Bernard of Clairvaux to prove this point, demonstrating how Bernard could be selectively misquoted in the way Columbanus was.<sup>154</sup>

Hay also noted that Columbanus' arguments were also made in the context of the dating of Easter: during the debate, he did not argue for the right of the "Celtic" churches to celebrate Easter separately from the continent, but rather that the Celtic-84 tables, as the original calculated by Saint Jerome, were the orthodox tables to be consulted when celebrating Easter. He wrote that the Celtic-84 practitioners saw themselves as the correct and orthodox practitioners of the Catholic Church whose ways needed to be spread to the rest of Christendom.<sup>155</sup>

According to Hay, Columbanus' harshest language was conditional. Only if the Popes were to disagree with him did he use it. In other letters, when they agreed with him, he spoke

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<sup>153</sup> Hay, *Chain of Error*, 87-8.

<sup>154</sup> Hay, *Chain of Error*, 88-92.

<sup>155</sup> Hay, *Chain of Error*, 98.

in submissive language, such as "Rome is the head of the churches of the whole world... do thou follow Peter; and let the whole Church follow thee."<sup>156</sup> Hay concluded the chapter by noting that although Scotland and Ireland were isolated from the European continent, they never saw themselves as separate from the universal Catholic Church headed by the Pope.<sup>157</sup>

Historians writing in the later 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries have largely adopted the positions first advocated by Hay in emphasising the united nature of early Christianity, but not necessarily his opinion on the Papacy. Donald Meek, while not using the language of a united Catholic Church that Hay used, noted that medieval commentators who wrote on the Easter Controversy such as Bede had no concept of an independent "Celtic Church". Like Hay, he believed that modern authors depicting the controversy as a struggle between separate Celtic and Roman churches as being severely mistaken.<sup>158</sup> Caitlin Corning, in her 2006 *Celtic and Roman Traditions: Conflict and Consensus in the Early Medieval Church*, wrote that all churches at the time Columbanus was writing acknowledged the Pope as the legitimate heir of Peter, and accorded him special respect because of this status. She also wrote that Western Christians of this era also saw Rome as the centre of Christian orthodoxy, Similar to Hay, Corning also concluded that while Columbanus' letters were strongly worded by modern standards, he did respect the Pope but also believed it was possible for the latter to err and fail to defend orthodoxy from heresy, in which case the Pope should be criticised. Nevertheless, while emphasising the symbolic authority of the Pope, Corning also emphasised that the highest spiritual authority in this era was in fact the ecumenical councils, not the Papacy.<sup>159</sup>

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<sup>156</sup> Hay, *Chain of Error*, 92-100.

<sup>157</sup> Hay, *Chain of Error*, 105-6.

<sup>158</sup> Meek, *Quest for Celtic Christianity*, 136-8.

<sup>159</sup> Corning, *Celtic and Roman Traditions*, 30-33.

Although Corning mostly echoes Hay's arguments, she does not completely concur with him on the relationship between early Christians and the Papacy. In regards to her position on the primacy of the Papacy versus the Ecumenical Councils as the supreme scriptural authority in Christendom, it may also be noted that she (and other more recent historians) come closer to Mackintosh's view that the early Church was "neither the one nor the other [sic], as they are understood and fixed in the creeds and polities of modern times. In this respect, compared to Caitlin and others, Hay's position does appear to be the kind of sectarian attempt to connect early Christians to modern denominations that had no equivalents in the 7th century that Mackintosh criticised in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

In Chapter VII, Hay discussed the writings of William Skene, whom he held responsible for propagating many myths about Celtic Christianity. That Hay felt that an entire chapter was needed to refute Skene is significant, given that he was content with critiquing other authors in shorter sections within other chapters in *A Chain of Error*. Beginning with a summary of the various letters Columbanus wrote to the Pope, Hay pointed out that these letters demonstrate the close contact between Ireland and Rome during the Early Mediaeval Ages and the fact that the Gaels in this period considered themselves subjects of Rome. In his mind, this refuted the notion perpetuated by Skene that they regarded themselves as independent of the Pope's authority. Hay held that Skene had committed a grievous historical offence by changing the wording and circumstances of a letter Columbanus wrote to the Pope.

For all we Irish living at the uttermost ends of the earth are the disciples of SS. Peter and Paul, and of all the disciples who wrote the sacred canon under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit; receiving nothing outside the evangelical and apostolical doctrine; no heretic, no Jew, no schismatic was ever amongst us; but the Catholic Faith as it was

first delivered to us from you, the successors, that is, of the holy apostles, is retained amongst us unchanged.<sup>160</sup>

Rather than quoting this passage as a part of a letter attempting to convince the Pope of the correctness of Irish practices during his dispute with the Gallic bishops, Hay charged Skene of omitting critical parts of the final sentence and claimed Columba had spoken it to the Gauls during his initial landing, which are highlighted in bold:<sup>161</sup>

In the year 590 the ecclesiastical world in Gaul, in which the Franks and Burgundians were already settled, was startled by the sudden appearance of a small band of missionaries on her shores... When asked who they were and whence they came, they replied,— **We are Irish, dwelling at the very ends of the earth. We be men who receive naught beyond the doctrine of the evangelists and apostles. The Catholic faith, as it was first delivered by the successors of the holy apostles, is still maintained among us with unchanged fidelity.**<sup>162</sup> [Emphasis added]

According to Hay, it was by this quote mining and alteration of the original contract that Skene made it appear that Columbanus rejected Papal authority and was not in contact with the continent, an act Hay heavily condemned as “such blundering as is seldom found in the work of a reputable historian, that it was perhaps worth while [sic] trying to find out how he allowed himself to be so grievously led astray.”<sup>163</sup> It must be noted that Hay’s translation of Columbanus’ letter, and the assessment of its context, is very close to that of Corning’s 2006 translation that was previously quoted in this paper and repeated here for comparison.

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<sup>160</sup> Hay, *Chain of Error*, 111.

<sup>161</sup> Hay, *Chain of Error*, 107-111.

<sup>162</sup> William Forbes Skene. *Celtic Scotland: A history of ancient Alban*. Vol. 2. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1877, 6-7.

<sup>163</sup> Hay, *Chain of Error*, 112-117.

We Irish are disciples of Saints Peter and Paul and of all the disciples who wrote the Sacred Canon by the Holy Ghost, and we accept nothing outside the evangelical and apostolic writings; none has been a Judaizer, none a schismatic; but the Catholic Faith, as it was delivered by you first, who are the successors of the Holy Apostles, is maintained unbroken.<sup>164</sup>

Chapter VIII concerns a series of historical controversies primarily forgotten today: Columbanus and his relationship with Queen Brunhilda of Austrasia and her relationship with Pope Gregory the Great. Much of Brunhilda's life was characterised by palace intrigues and violence. The daughter of the King of the Visigoths in Iberia, Brunhilda married Sigebert I of Austrasia, who was assassinated seven years after their wedding. She became regent for her young son, Childebert II, and became involved in conflicts over the rights of her grandson, Theodebert II, and great-great nephew, Sigebert II, to rule the kingdom. She was subsequently captured by her rivals, the Burgundians, at 79 and tortured to death. Columbanus had met Brunhilda, who asked him to bless Theodebert's children; however, Columbanus refused because they were illegitimate. This enraged the Queen and Columbanus was forced to leave Austrasia.<sup>165</sup>

Hay charged Catholic and Protestant historians with demonising Brunhilda, a very religious woman and an ally of Pope Gregory the Great. In particular, he held that Protestants used the meeting with Columbanus and Brunhilda as an opportunity to demonstrate the Church's superiority over the State by casting Brunhilda as a Jezebel-like figure who promoted the "vices" of her grandchildren; one may also see a similarity between the Free Kirk's conflicts with the Scottish government in this parable. Similarly, he held that

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<sup>164</sup> Corning, *Celtic and Roman Traditions*, 32.

<sup>165</sup> Ian Wood, *The Merovingian Kingdoms, 450-751*. (London, UK: Routledge, 2014), 133.



Protestant propagandists used Brunhilda's close ties to Pope Gregory as further proof of the immorality of the Catholic Church and the superiority of the Celtic Church and the Protestants. As was the case in previous chapters, Hay cited the tendency to copy sources without examining them closely as a significant factor in perpetuating these myths.<sup>166</sup>

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, Brunhilda has fallen into obscurity to a certain extent, with little scholarly information devoted to her life. However, a French language biography published of her life in 2008 by Bruno Dumézil described her ironically as “‘a man of state,’ living in a key moment of history, when the Roman Empire is slowly collapsing and a new order is striving to replace it.”<sup>167</sup> Carolyn Harris, writing in 2016, notes that Queen Brunhilda's negative reputation is only part of a larger historiographic tradition of hostility towards French or Frankish queen-consorts, and she figured during the French Revolution as a symbol within anti-royalist propaganda against Marie Antoinette.<sup>168</sup> The *Dictionary of Women's Biography* gives a positive assessment of her reign, writing that “‘Later historians have seen her as a great stateswoman, who maintained a consistent policy of supporting the throne against the aristocracy, at the same time exercising firm control over the development of the Frankish Church.”<sup>169</sup> From these scant sources, it does appear that Malcolm Hay's revisionist assessment of Brunhilda has been supported by modern historians, albeit without the sectarian framework used by himself or his contemporaries.

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<sup>166</sup> Hay, *Chain of Error*, 128-148.

<sup>167</sup> Philippe-Jean Catinchi, “Brunhilda, Queen of Austrasia,” *Biography*, (Summer 2008): 505.

<sup>168</sup> Carolyn Harrison, *Queenship and Revolution in Early Modern Europe: Henrietta Maria and Marie Antoinette* (New York City, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 39, 45.

<sup>169</sup> Jennifer Uglow, Frances Hinton, and Maggy Hendry, *The Macmillan Dictionary of Women's Biography* (London, UK: Papermac, 1999), 100.

Chapter IX, The Unknown Warrior, is dedicated to Jean Gorini, a French priest and historian that Hay noted was largely unknown in the English-speaking world; indeed, this chapter remains the most extended English source about him as of 2023. Born in 1803, Gorini spent most of his career as a parish priest in the small village of La Tranclière to the northeast of Lyon, where he lived in poverty. Despite this, he published *Défense de l'église contre les erreurs historiques* in 1853, which brought him widespread acclaim in France.<sup>170</sup> Similar to Malcolm Hay's own work, *Défense* centred around popular and scholarly misconceptions about the history of the Catholic Church. According to Hay, *Défense* began with a summary of church history before moving on to quotations from prominent French historians and how they misrepresented history. Gorini then presented his summary of events using citations from primary sources, a similar method to *A Chain of Error*. Notable about the public reception of *Défense* was that, according to Hay, it was supposedly received in near-universally favourable terms. Hay claimed Augustin Thierry took the critiques graciously and subsequently corrected them in later editions of his work, citing a letter to Gorini as evidence, and implied that Thierry's conversion to Catholicism was partly due to Gorini.<sup>171</sup>

There appears to be little scholarship on Jean Gorini in English. However, Rulon Nephri Smithson discussed his relationship to Augustin Thierry in the former's 1972 *Augustin Thierry: Social and Political Consciousness in the Evolution of a Historical Method*. Here, Smithson does confirm the presence of correspondence between the two historians, and that Thierry did make certain concessions to Gorini regarding his history of the Catholic

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<sup>170</sup> Hay, *Chain of Error*, 155-7

<sup>171</sup> Malcolm Hay, *Chain of Error*, 157-8.

Church.<sup>172</sup> Koenraad W. Swart, writing in 2013, quoted Gorini's *Défense* as an example of reactionary Catholic literature produced in 1850s France which attacked rationalism and secularism as byproducts of the Reformation.<sup>173</sup> This aspect of Gorini's literature is unmentioned by Hay but has similarities to his attacks on the Reformation at the beginning of *A Chain of Error*. It is likely that Hay's advocacy of this otherwise little-known historical figure draws upon their common roots in conservatism and antagonism to liberalism, whether it was the anti-clericalism of Whig ideology in Britain or Republicanism in France.

Chapter X, *Spirit Methods and Aims*, primarily focuses on German Celticist Heinrich Zimmer, whom Hay wrote was the first to report that the "Celtic Church" differed fundamentally from the 'Roman Church' in the things of the spirit", with an opening section on Dr Hume Brown's *A History of Scotland for Schools*.<sup>174</sup> Although previous writers emphasised the superiority of the Celtic Church based on its supposed proto-Protestant nature, Zimmer emphasised differences in "spiritual qualities" that would be considered ethnic and religious stereotypes today, listing four in particular: that the Celts were tolerant of opposing views and the continental Latins were not, that the Celts did not produce forgeries and that the Latins did (or that the Celts were honest and the Latins not), that the Celts emphasised personal spirituality and individual freedom while the Latins demanded conformity and adherence to ritual, and that the Celts did not venerate relics.<sup>175</sup>

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<sup>172</sup> Rulon Nephi Smithson, *Augustin Thierry: Social and Political Consciousness in the Evolution of a Historical Method*, Google Books (Geneva, Switzerland: Droz, 1972),

[https://www.google.ca/books/edition/Augustin\\_Thierry\\_Social\\_and\\_Political\\_Co/PWKqEN\\_y-CEC?hl=en&gbpv=0](https://www.google.ca/books/edition/Augustin_Thierry_Social_and_Political_Co/PWKqEN_y-CEC?hl=en&gbpv=0), 276-81.

<sup>173</sup> K. W. Swart, *The Sense of Decadence in Nineteenth-Century France* (The Hague, Netherlands: M. Nijhoff, 1964), 87.

<sup>174</sup> Hay, *Chain of Error*, 179.

<sup>175</sup> Hay, *Chain of Error*, 174-81.

Against Zimmer's four points, Hay quoted several Church fathers, such as Saint Augustine, who pleaded for tolerance and emphasised Columbanus' attempts at imposing the obsolete method of calculating Easter on the Gauls. Second, he cited the use by Irish monks of forged documents attributed to Bishop Anatolius to advance their case in the Easter controversy. Regarding the third claim, Hay wrote that Zimmer used a sermon from Saint Aldheim to promote his case for a Roman Catholic "formal Christianity" in the Early Middle Ages, which Hay quoted to demonstrate that there were no references to adherence to outward observances in the relevant sections. Finally, Hay noted that while documentary evidence was scarce, incidents such as Saint Colman of Lindisfarne bringing the bones of Saint Aidan to Ireland after the Synod of Whitby do point in favour of a cult of relics. Hay concluded the chapter by that these attempts at listing "spiritual" differences between the Celtic and Roman churches were at heart efforts to claim the former was superior to the latter.<sup>176</sup>

The final chapter, 'The Chain Still Unbroken', primarily concerns A.R. MacEwen, Professor of Church History at the New College of Edinburgh, who died before *A Chain of Error*'s publication, and his 1913 *History of the Church of Scotland*. Hay opened this chapter with criticisms of university professors of history, whom he charged as being too busy teaching and being engaged in other work as professionals to keep their jobs and being forced to conform to public opinion, lest they be fired. Conversely, he held that "amateurs" like himself could act as iconoclasts without worrying about their careers. He then moved on to his criticism on MacEwen in particular. It is difficult to appraise these polemical attacks on university historians without in depth research into different universities, their professors, and

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<sup>176</sup> Hay, *Chain of Error*, 181-91.

their views and tenure. However, they appear to be rooted in an idealisation of the life of an independently wealthy “antiquarian” historian like Hay himself, where one would theoretically be free to pursue research as one pleases without the burdens of university work culture and obligations.

Although MacEwen claimed that he was not relying on previous secondary sources to write his work and that he would depend on the primary sources alone, Hay held that MacEwen repeated mistakes committed by earlier authors on the topic, in a manner frequently seen in earlier chapters of *A Chain of Error*. These included the Living Dog misquote, followed by supposed misquotes from Columbanus’ letters to Pope Boniface IV and Hay’s argument that MacEwen had taken Columbanus’ words out of context. Hay went further, claiming MacEwen had again copied sources from previous historians who had made the same misquotes. MacEwen also quoted a secondary source, the 18th century Turgot’s *Life of Queen Margaret of Scotland*, as lacking references to Catholic structure or organisation.<sup>177</sup>

In his concluding paragraph, Hay predicted an end to the anti-Catholic propaganda that began with the Reformation and was perpetuated by historians such as the ones discussed in his work. He wrote of his conviction that “the end is in sight of the period during which history to be popular had to appeal to the prejudices of stupid, uneducated and conceited people” and ended his work with a quotation from Alfred Loisy: “Sooner or later, reality will be revenged on the attack against it; the greater the lie, so much the more will it ultimately appear grotesque, and the greater will be its fall”, and the Latin motto, “Veritas temporis filia”, or “Truth is the daughter of Time.”<sup>178</sup>

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<sup>177</sup> Hay, *Chain of Error*, 205-6.

<sup>178</sup> Hay, *Chain of Error*, 207.

## The Controversy

The publication of *A Chain of Error in Scottish History* was remarked on in scholarly circles in Scotland, as well as in various newspapers, both those tailored to a general audience as well as those specifically for Catholic readers.<sup>179</sup> The book proved controversial as it challenged the foundations of the Proto-Protestant Thesis, which, as noted above, was one of the intellectual justifications for the Protestant hegemony in Scotland. While it is difficult to gauge public interest in the book directly, frequent references to letters to the editor and statements published by journals after negative reviews indicate that even some lay people found Hay's questioning of a separate Celtic Church engaging.

The first and most vocal group to support Hay were Catholics writing in journals and newspapers specifically tailored to Catholic audiences, who had the most to gain by embracing the concept. However, a significant minority of Hay's supporters were Protestants who opposed anti-Catholic sectarianism. Most reviewers praised Hay's defence of the Catholic Church as a response to Protestant polemicists and commended his dedication to research and use of previously unseen historical materials. They also recognised and advocated the book's use in advancing Catholicism's cause, especially in scholarship. Nevertheless, many of them, especially those writing immediately after *A Chain of Error's* publication, predicted that the book would become the centre of sectarian controversy. The *Universe Catholic Review's* contributor, Father Martindale SJ, reviewed the work for its February 1928 issue:

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<sup>179</sup> Williamson, *Catholic Intellectual Life*, 185.

Major M. V. Hay's book has three qualities rarely combined— it is erudite, amusing and useful. It even contains unedited material, viz. the letter written by St.

Columbanus of Bobbio to Boniface IV. It makes one almost despair of historians, if not of history. The whole ground has to be worked over again. One man, often from mixed motives, makes a 'mistake'. Perhaps he just tilts the balance of the evidence a little, but forthwith writers copy him down the ages. This book, which will be ferociously attacked, unless a conspiracy of guilty silence ignores it, must not be neglected by even one of our historical students, if only for its teaching of the Method!<sup>180</sup>

Wilkinson Sherrin's review for the February 1928 issue of *Columba* included the following excerpts:

History, as it should be written, is to be found in a valuable work entitled "A Chain of Error of Scottish History" by M.V. Hay. Several years of patient research must have gone into its preparation. Its precision and exactitude are quietly evidence, and in fair-minded restraint, this book is a model of "how to do it"... This book should be in all Catholic libraries, and it would form an excellent subject for study circles.<sup>181</sup>

An anonymous editor of *The Month*, the leading English-language journal of the Society of Jesus, also praised Hay.<sup>182</sup> He noted that in an environment where many Catholic scholars merely pointed out the bigotry that many of their Protestant counterparts displayed, Hay endeavoured to show that their methods were also invalid, "not merely striking at the great

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<sup>180</sup> SJ Martingale, ed., "BOOK NOTES— Historical," *University Catholic Review*, February 1928, quoted in 1. Alice Ivy Hay, *Valiant for Truth: Malcolm Hay of Seaton* (London, UK: Spearman, 1971), 137.

<sup>181</sup> William Sherran, "Error in History," *Columba*, February 1928.

<sup>182</sup> Alex van Goethem, "Cataloguing 'the Month.'" British Jesuit Archive, August 11, 2019. <https://www.jesuitarchives.co.uk/post/cataloguing-the-month>.

Upas-tree of anti-Catholic prejudice” but “striking at the roots”.<sup>183</sup> The editor additionally described how “certain phrases have been torn from their context, quoted and re-quoted till they became a Protestant shibboleth, a sort of substitute for the Apostles' Creed”, implying that Protestants replaced true faith for an anti-Catholic bigotry and that by extension they are not “true” Christians like Catholics implicitly are. However, he described that the true core of Hay’s work wasn’t merely that “vulgar controversialists” had co-opted and systemically misrepresented church history, but so had mainstream and highly respected historians such as Gibbons and Heinrich Zimmer. In conclusion, the editor wrote that this book was a revolutionary work of historiography that would be an invaluable tool for the advancement of Catholicism, and that “The book before us is a pioneer, it is a worthy piece of work, and it may do us a whole lot of good”.<sup>184</sup>

Although Hay, as a Roman Catholic, found many Catholic supporters of his work from the moment of *A Chain of Error*’s publication, there were Protestant historians, even churchmen, who supported Hay’s findings. One such individual, the Reverend David Graham, gave a positive review in the 3 December 1927 edition of the *Perthshire Advertiser*. Graham mentioned many strengths of *A Chain of Error* in his review, such as Hay’s discovery of Columba’s unabridged letter to Pope Gregory I, describing Hay as “a devoted Catholic, but [one who] writes with a candour with his admirable and with critical insight which proclaims him to be a true student.”<sup>185</sup> Much of the review is centred around Hay’s condemnation of Protestant sectarianism and anti-Catholic bias in scholarship. In one paragraph, Graham wrote, “That many Protestants have been reared against Catholics there

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<sup>183</sup> *The Month*, 1928-01 Vol 151 Iss 763, 82-83.

<sup>184</sup> *The Month*, 84.

<sup>185</sup> David Graham, “Week-End Reflections. Error in History.” *Perthshire Advertiser*. December 3, 1927.



can be no doubt in an atmosphere against Catholics there can be no doubt; and there can be no less doubt that this odious spirit has rendered so many incapable of just judgement and charitable options.”<sup>186</sup> Indeed, Graham even praised the Catholic Church despite noting it was not his denomination. He found it highly doubtful that an institution as significant and with as deep a past as the Catholic Church would be based entirely on “avarice and lust”, noting that numerous greatly admired “statesmen, scholars, saints [and] missionaries of unexampled devotion” have also been Catholic.<sup>187</sup>

Graham’s review is of historical interest for two reasons. First, it acknowledges that *A Chain of Error* was published in a period of heightened sectarianism between Catholics and Protestants. Graham strongly praised this book as one that could lead to greater understanding between Catholics and Protestants and one that would dispel many myths about Celtic Christianity that were used to establish the supremacy of Protestants over Catholics. Much of the text appears to be written for a Protestant audience, pleading them to understand Catholics more, quoting from the Bible verse “Judge not, lest ye be judged” as an example. This preoccupation within much of the text hints at the presence of anti-Catholic prejudices in Perthshire at the time of writing. That Graham was a Protestant also demonstrates that despite heightened sectarian tensions, moderates could be highly critical of the increasingly nationalistic, sectarian ideologies gaining popularity in the 1920s. Graham used his review to praise Hay and make his anti-sectarian views known to the public.

In the spring of 1928, the *Church Times* also reviewed *A Chain of Error*, which was not as positive. The *Church Times* supported Anglo-Catholicism or the “High Church”

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<sup>186</sup> Graham. “Reflections.” *Perthshire Advertiser*. December 3, 1927.

<sup>187</sup> Graham, “Reflections.” *Perthshire Advertiser*. December 3, 1927.

movement.<sup>188</sup> This movement, which began in the early 19th century, supported the return of the Anglican Church to Catholic-style rituals and liturgy, and was deeply opposed by the Evangelical movement, which regarded these practices as excessive.<sup>189</sup> This perspective likely influenced its sympathy for Malcolm Hay and his thesis. The anonymous *Church Times* review was more neutral in language than Graham's. The editor agreed with Hay's assessment of the Magdeburg Centurions and other early Protestants as merely propaganda, and that "No honest man can now deny that such historical works as those turned out by Baronius on the other side are far more worthy of the name of history."<sup>190</sup> When turning to Hay's treatment of the Proto-Protestant Thesis, they agreed with his point that "It is absurd to contend that men like Columbanus repudiated Papal authority in the way that Luther did."<sup>191</sup> Nevertheless, they did add a point of criticism that Hay supposedly downplayed the significance of the Easter controversy, citing Bede's claims that "certain Celts and Latins refused not only inter-communion, but any friendly relations with each other",<sup>192</sup> concluding that a book covering the Easter controversy in the entirety of the British Isles was required to discuss its scale and impact on British-Irish society properly.<sup>193</sup>

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<sup>188</sup> "Church Times: About Us." *Church Times*: about us. Accessed October 11, 2023. <https://www.churchtimes.co.uk/about-us>.

<sup>189</sup> Jeremy N. Morris, *The High Church Revival in the Church of England: Arguments and Identities*, Brill (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2016), <https://brill-com.myaccess.library.utoronto.ca/display/title/33766>, 1-2.

<sup>190</sup> "Celt and Latin: A Chain of Error in Scottish History. By M. V. Hay. (Longmans; Green and Co., 10s. 6d.)," *Church Times*, March 9, 1928.

<sup>191</sup> "Celt and Latin"

<sup>192</sup> "Celt and Latin"

<sup>193</sup> "Celt and Latin"

Subsequent commentators, such as the *Aberdeen Press and Journal*<sup>194</sup> and the *Universe*,<sup>195</sup> cited this example as a positive Protestant review of *A Chain of Error*. While the review in question did positively assess Hay’s claim that the Celtic Christians considered themselves part of a universal Catholic Church under the leadership of the Pope, it also thought Hay’s handling of the Easter Controversy to be a point against the book. The reviewer considered the controversy to be a significant de-facto split between the Celtic Christians and their continental equivalents, citing the Venerable Bede’s claims that the two parties did not even celebrate communion with each other as evidence. While the editor described the Celtic Christians as being “not... a whit more charitable than their Latin opponents—if anything, they were less so,”; however, it was Hay who pointed out this fact, something they failed to acknowledge in the review.<sup>196</sup>

As expected by its supporters, criticism of *A Chain of Error* began almost immediately after publication. One of its first critics, Dr William Douglas Simpson, was a professor of history and an archaeologist at the University of Aberdeen.<sup>197</sup> On December 27, 1927, Simpson posted a lengthy critique of *A Chain of Error in Scottish History* in the *Aberdeen Press and Journal*. This critique was nuanced and mild compared to other critics who would follow. While acknowledging the systemic history of misquoting Columbanus, Simpson asserted that given the highly charged language of his letters to successive Popes, Columbanus was more than willing to go against the Papal word if they decided against him.

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<sup>194</sup> “‘A Chain of Error.’ Views for and against the Book.” *Aberdeen Journal*. April 2, 1928.

<sup>195</sup> “A ‘Chain of Error,’” *The Universe*, April 13, 1928.

<sup>196</sup> “Celt and Latin”

<sup>197</sup> A. T. Hall, “Simpson, William (1823–1899),” *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, February 6, 2018, <https://doi.org/10.1093/odnb/9780192683120.013.25597>.

Second, Simpson listed various characteristics of Celtic Christianity that purportedly made it separate from the Catholic Church: he once again asserted the importance of abbots over bishops in the region. He noted that even individual monasteries depended on local tribes for favour and power, unlike Catholic bishops who could exercise their power without worry. Simpson accused Hay of downplaying this feature as being incompatible with the Papal Supremacy Thesis.<sup>198</sup> Simpson continued, claiming that the Celtic and Catholic churches tended to clash almost immediately on interaction, which he asserted was also evidence of their separate nature. Defending the traditional narrative of the anti-Catholic Culdee, he quoted a proclamation from King David I of Scotland ordering that the Culdees either join the Augustinian order or be exiled: “The Culdees who shall be found there if they are willing to live as Regulars, may remain at peace, but if any one of them is inclined to offer resistance to this I will and ordain that he be expelled from this island.”<sup>199</sup> While not giving direct quotations, Simpson referenced the Bishop of Saint Andrews’ word that the Culdees were successfully suppressed in the aftermath of the proclamation. Simpson also wrote that the Culdee “College” of Monymusk was only turned into an Augustinian monastery under the threat of Papal reprisal.<sup>200</sup>

Simpson additionally argued that there were campaigns of suppressing Celtic saints and institutions wherever the Catholic Church had extended itself into Scotland. He cited texts written by 12<sup>th</sup>-century Jocelin of Furness, who wrote a biography of St Kentigern that claimed that he had suppressed elements “contrary to Catholic doctrine” and imparted “a Roman flavour” to his biography. Simpson maintained that this was evidence that the

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<sup>198</sup> William Douglas Simpson. “Christianity in Early Scotland.” *Aberdeen Journal*. December 27, 1927.

<sup>199</sup> Simpson, “Christianity in Early Scotland,” *Aberdeen Press and Journal*, December 27, 1927.

<sup>200</sup> Simpson, *Early Scotland*.

Catholic Church had deliberately suppressed details about Kentigern's life contrary to Catholicism. He also noted the destruction of many High Crosses, a distinct feature of Celtic Christianity and their recycling into later architecture as material evidence of such campaigns.

The last part of Simpson's rebuttal of *A Chain of Error* was directed towards Hay's criticisms of historians like Skene. He maintained that while Hay had demonstrated significant methodological errors in Skene's works, to say that they resulted from anti-Catholic bias was excessive and unwarranted. Similarly, he described Hay's criticism of Gibbon as unfounded and asserted that the latter was well-versed in church history, contrary to what Hay wrote. His final criticism of Hay's work concerned belief in the inherent power of relics. In contrast to Hay, who emphasised that Catholic doctrine does not attribute supernatural powers to relics in themselves, Simpson cited the 16<sup>th</sup>-century humanist Hector Boece's attribution of the Scottish victory at Bannockburn to the presence of the arm of St Fillian and also quoted at length from Jocelin's biography of St Kentigern, written at the behest of the Bishop of Glasgow, about how the saint's "sacred bones are known to put forth power from their place" and, "at his tomb, sight is restored to the blind, [and] hearing to the deaf".<sup>201</sup>

Hay's subsequent critics were not as complementary as Simpson. The most significant negative review of *A Chain of Error* came in the *Times Literary Supplement* in its March 22, 1928 issue. While the review was published anonymously, the archives of the TLS identify him as James Houston Baxter.<sup>202</sup> Baxter (1894-1973) was the last Regius Divinity Professor

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<sup>201</sup> Simpson, *Early Scotland*.

<sup>202</sup> James Houston Baxter, "A 'Chain of Error,'" *Times Literary Supplement*, March 22, 1928, 215.

at the University of Saint Andrews. He was also Chair of Ecclesiastical History of the university after spending a year as the Church of Scotland minister of Ballantrae.<sup>203</sup> Baxter had a long list of contributions to the field of church history, such as the creation of a new edition of St Augustine's letters, a history of the Christian Church from 312-800, and the discovery and publication of a book of letters written by a medieval prior of St Andrew for which the University of St Andrew's awarded him a Doctor of Letters degree in 1930. In addition to his scholarly work, Baxter was also involved in the excavation of the Byzantine imperial palace in modern-day Istanbul from 1935 to 1942.<sup>204</sup>

Baxter began with an appraisal of the state of professional history in Scotland, positively stating that "confessional interest and the national prejudice, which for long left whole periods unexamined and many problems only partially dissected, are probably quite extinct", and that "In a country where national feeling and religious partisanship are so strong, it accounts for much that these barriers to scholarship have been so largely overcome." He then launched his attack on Hay, accusing him of "[demanding] a return to the pursuit of history as a confessional and polemical weapon" and that "he cannot distinguish between intellectual error and moral ubiquity". He objected quite strongly to Hay's attacks on prominent historians such as Edward Gibbon. Baxter dismissed Hay's long list of historians believed to be anti-Catholic and partisan in their agenda. He further rejected Hay's use of the "living dog" quotation as being "only one link in the argument for Celtic independence of Rome, one that is neither the chief nor the most useful", and that Hay

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<sup>203</sup> Hugh Scott, *Fasti Ecclesiae Scoticae*, vol. 8 (Edinburgh, UK: Oliver and Boyd, 1950), 187.

<sup>204</sup> "Papers of James Houston Baxter." Archives Hub. Accessed January 15, 2024.

<https://archiveshub.jisc.ac.uk/search/archives/ad673f01-716f-3731-aac1-4c2d956a73b2>

ignored the work of other historians, such as Occam, Wield and Hus. In conclusion, Baxter wrote, “defence of the unfortunate historians assailed by Mr Hay is unnecessary, for the book is its own best antidote.”<sup>205</sup>

Modern scholars examining this review may find several noticeable points. Very little of its contents are dedicated to debunking any of the claims Hay made on an intellectual basis, such as Hay’s extensive quoting from primary source documents stating that early Gaelic Christians regarded themselves as part of a universal Catholic church. Instead, much of the rhetoric aims at dismissing Hay’s criticisms of mainstream historiography on the grounds that they are unwarranted. A point made multiple times is that Hay’s attacks on previously widely regarded historians are unjustified, characterised in such quotations such as “The author’s treatment of historians, alive and dead, is deplorable... his criticisms of honoured names... are eminent examples of a method which cannot be too severely condemned”.<sup>206</sup> Similarly, the reviewer did not make any arguments regarding *Chain of Error* was wrong but put much effort into making him seem unreasonably hostile, using charged rhetoric such as “This misrepresentation is the outcome of a conspiracy, and Professors and Doctors have slavishly copied from each other.”<sup>207</sup>

A third negative review of *A Chain of Error* was as brief as it was dismissive. It was also written by James Houston Baxter and published in the April 1928 issue of the *Scottish Historical Review*. It is reproduced in its entirety below.

BEGINNING with Flacius Illyricus, the author of this volume describes how the ecclesiastical historians have conspired to make the Celtic Church of the sixth century

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<sup>205</sup> James Houston Baxter, “A ‘Chain of Error,’” *Times Literary Supplement*, March 22, 1928, 215.

<sup>206</sup> Baxter, “Chain of Error,” 215.

<sup>207</sup> Baxter, “Chain of Error,” 215.

appear independent of Rome, and to show that Pope Gregory I connived at the murders and intrigues of Queen Brunhilda. The violently partisan and abusive character of the work precludes any serious notice in a review of this nature. It is a specimen of immoderate and fanatical vituperation which is now, for the most part, happily extinct. More recent historians, such as Clifford Williamson, have noted that in accusing Hay of being “violently partisan and Abusive”, Baxter was himself highly partisan and abusive. He did not attempt to refute Hay’s thesis on scholarly grounds but merely on account of Hay’s language.<sup>208</sup> While Williamson did not discuss why Baxter chose to write a pithy dismissal instead of criticism of its points, he noted that Baxter was a National Kirk minister which suggests that sectarianism and anti-Catholic bias was at least a partial factor.<sup>209</sup> Williamson quoted Reverend David McRoberts, who wrote that Baxter’s review “seemed to confirm to Catholics that ‘Scotland had shared with Great Britain as a whole, a restricted, but very persistent tradition of hostility to Catholic scholarship’.”<sup>210</sup>

That James Houston Baxter, as author of both the TLS and SHR reviews, played a major role in the controversy around *A Chain of Error* has not been previously discussed in historical literature or contemporary newspapers. Until 2024, authors writing on Malcolm Hay, such as Alice Ivy Hay and Clifford Williamson, have assumed that these articles were published separately. However, as the TLS research demonstrates, much of the controversy was the result of Baxter being able to use his influence to publish negative articles on the book. It is apparent from works such as Douglas Simpson’s review that there were Protestant scholars who remained opposed to Hay’s work. Nevertheless, the fact that two of the most

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<sup>208</sup> Williamson, *Catholic Intellectual Life*, 186.

<sup>209</sup> Scott, Hew. *Fasti Ecclesiae Scoticae*. Vol. VIII. Edinburgh, UK: Oliver and Boyd, 1950, 187.

<sup>210</sup> Williamson, *Catholic Intellectual Life*, 186.



controversial anti-Hay articles in the controversy were apparently published by a single person does reduce the number of Protestant writers opposed to Hay by one. At the very least, it implies that the Protestant scholars were far more divided on *A Chain of Error* than print media implies. It does not appear that anyone at the time was involved to the same extent as Baxter. As noted above, previous commentators on Hay, and least of all the man himself, do not appear to have been aware of the connection between Baxter and the articles. It is therefore here that the investigation into Baxter's role in it must be concluded.

In addition to negative reviews, documents from the time of *A Chain of Error's* publication seem to indicate the existence of a Protestant boycott of the book. A *Catholic Times* headline from March 30, 1928, sensationally proclaims the existence of "A LEAGUE AND COVENANT OF SILENCE AND SECTARIANISM" and "THE BOYCOTTING OF MR HAY'S BOOK". The article goes further, accusing Protestants of forming a "smoke-screen, lest Protestants should discover, by reading this book, how much they have been deceived by sectarian historians who had an axe to grind against Rome. An attempt is being made to form a league of silence about it".<sup>211</sup> Unfortunately for historians, the paper does not elaborate upon the nature of the boycott any further, with the remainder of the article consisting of a summary of *A Chain of Error* and a criticism of the *TLS* review. Only at the end of the article do the editors urge readers to break the supposed boycott by buying copies of the book, "and make sure that when a writer has told the truth he gets public."<sup>212</sup> A letter to the same paper from April 13 written by a priest, J. J. Gilmartin, titled "Boycotting the Truth" also attests to the presence of a boycott. However, once again, there is little more information

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<sup>211</sup> "A League and Covenant of Silence and Sectarianism," *The Catholic Times*, March 30, 1928.

<sup>212</sup> "A League and Covenant of Silence and Sectarianism," *The Catholic Times*, March 30, 1928.

on the boycott other than it exists and that the author urged all readers of the paper to buy a copy for “every library we control”.<sup>213</sup> At this point, one may be tempted to dismiss the boycott as an exaggeration by a sectarian paper. However, a letter to Hay from Hilaire Belloc dated 14 June 1929 independently attests to a boycott of uncertain nature against *A Chain of Error*. In the letter, Belloc lamented that the book was not read as often as it should be because of the boycott, which he described as “the new weapon against all Catholic work.”<sup>214</sup>

It is difficult to judge the extent of the boycott from the documents available to the public such as when it began or ended. It is also difficult to ascertain the extent to which *A Chain of Error* was or was not carried in bookshops due to a lack of available sources on print runs and sales. However, the independent confirmation of the existence of such a boycott by Hilaire Belloc does make its existence more plausible. A collection made by Hay of newspaper and journal references to his work does not seem to attest to the existence of many non-Catholic, non-local newspaper articles on the book, despite the notorious reviews of the *Times Literary Supplement* and *Scottish Historical Review* being present. This collection has no Protestant articles calling for a boycott of his works. From this, it may be surmised that the boycott, if it did exist, was less of an active campaign against Hay as it was an unofficial “league of silence” of Protestant publishers who were unwilling to discuss such a controversial and iconoclastic book in their newspapers or journals. Nevertheless, both *Catholic Times* and Belloc believed at the time that the unofficial boycott resulted in a

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<sup>213</sup> “Covenant of Silence”

<sup>214</sup> Hilaire Belloc to Malcolm Vivian Hay, 14 June 1929, GB 231 MS 2788 (Aberdeen, UK: Papers of Malcolm Vivian Hay of Seaton, University of Aberdeen Special Collections, The Sir Duncan Rice Library, University of Aberdeen,).

“deafening silence” that prevented the book from being read by a public that otherwise would have consumed it.

Catholics, and Malcolm Hay in particular, did not take the criticism lightly, particularly as they found many criticisms levied against the book to be unwarranted. Hay responded to several of his critics, first to Dr Simpson in the December 30 1927 issue of the *Aberdeen Press and Journal*, one prefaced by a note stating that *A Chain of Error* had generated great public interest. In a letter to the paper Hay wrote that he found much of the critique to be unfounded. First, he wrote that Simpson misunderstood the book’s purpose. It was not to demonstrate that the Celtic Christians were part of the Catholic Church, but that there was a longstanding misrepresentation of Catholicism in Protestant-majority scholarly circles, of which the Proto-Protestant Thesis was only one aspect. He noted that Simpson had downplayed the Celtic Christians’ allegiance to the Pope as “due deference” and that he had misquoted Columbanus, stating that Simpson wrote “confusingly on matters of the two issues of doctrine and discipline” and emphasised reading Columbanus’ letters in total. Continuing, Hay addressed Simpson’s claim that the Culdees were hostile to the mainstream Roman Catholic Church. He wrote that Simpson had proven "not that the Culdees were hostile to the Roman See, but that the Roman See was hostile to the Culdees" and that we do not have direct evidence as what exactly caused the mainstream Catholic Church’s hostilities towards them. Hay also noted that while many “Celtic” style churches were abandoned in favour of continental equivalents, there is no direct evidence for deliberate, systematic destruction of these sites. Regarding Gibbon, Hay wrote that Simpson had misunderstood his own criticisms of the 18<sup>th</sup> century historian and his biases. Hay also discussed Simpson’s commentary on sections of the book on William Skene. Hay clarified that he meant that much of the biases he believed Skene held were unconscious, apologising for any implication of bad faith on

Skene's behalf, but charged Simpson of not formally refuting any of his claims regarding Skene. The final point of his letter is that it is the formal teaching of the Catholic Church, not widespread misunderstandings thereof (both Protestant and Catholic), which claims that God alone has the power to work through relics.<sup>215</sup>

Hay also responded to the *Times Literary Supplement's* review of his work and was keen to correct the misrepresentation of the book by the anonymous reviewer. Two weeks after the original review was published, Hay wrote to the journal, complaining bitterly of the poor treatment given to him and claiming three points had been misrepresented: first, that the intention of his work was primarily to demonstrate the biases held by historians in Scotland up to that point, and not to refute the Proto-Protestant Thesis in particular. Second, the remark of "the author's co-religionists" implied *ad hominem* that Hay had only made the arguments he set out in *A Chain of Error* because he was a Catholic and that he was unconcerned with scholarly bias otherwise. Third, many of their attacks, such as Hay's "deplorable" "treatment of historians... alive and dead", had been made without any evidence to back up such a harsh assertion. Hay concluded his letter with a challenge to the reviewer to bring up a single case of mistreating a historian and their work and wrote that he was prepared to apologise should they succeed. This letter would begin a feud between Hay and the *TLS* through April 1928.<sup>216</sup>

The anonymous reviewer now known to be Baxter responded to Hay in a subsequent issue of the *Times Literary Supplement* on April 12. In the first half of their letter, the reviewer stated the importance of Hay proving his thesis before demonstrating that the others were wrong and that they had found his work to be wanting. This part of the letter primarily centred on Hay's translation of Columbanus' letter to Gregory I, which they claimed had

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<sup>215</sup> Malcolm Vivian Hay, "Christianity in Early Scotland," *Aberdeen Press and Journal*, December 30, 1930.

<sup>216</sup> Malcolm Vivian Hay, "A Chain of Error," *Times Literary Supplement*, April 5, 1928, 257.

numerous errors, either in interpretation (such as claiming polite phrases equivalent to “your obedient servant” were proof of actual deference) to outright mistranslation (such as understating how much Columbanus supposedly saw himself as being independent of the Pope). In the second half, the reviewer listed a long series of literary attacks Hay had written about famous historians, quoting examples such as accusing MacEwen of “physical and mental blindness”, “unique... in the historical literature of Scotland”, in his biography of Queen Margaret for claiming that her biography had lacked references to bishops and other orthodox Catholic leaders, and claimed that Hay had taken MacEwen’s words out of context when claiming a “physical and mental blindness”.<sup>217</sup>

In response, Hay wrote back to the *TLS* the following week, on April 19, to refute the charges of his reviewer. First, he dismissed the attacks on his translation of Columbanus’ letter as being irrelevant to the basic premise of the book which he had laid out in his previous letter, namely, to expose a long tradition of misrepresentation in Scottish historiography. Regarding the second half of the reviewer’s letter, Hay wrote that he had backed up these attacks on “distinguished names” with evidence of misrepresentations. Concerning MacEwen in particular, Hay noted that the biography of Margaret is exceptionally brief, concluding that the former’s claims that the biography lacked references to bishops or popes resulted from spectacular incompetence or intentional misrepresentation, particularly as Mac Ewen had based much of his arguments around the independence of the Catholic Church around this supposed lack of references to Catholic hierarchy. In conclusion, Hay challenged the reviewer on the central portion of his book: “Have or have not ‘honoured names’ aided a false tradition when they could, with the least possible outlay of obligatory

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<sup>217</sup> “A Chain of Error,” *Times Literary Supplement*, April 12, 1928, 272.

care, have found out the facts... and who is deserving of the greater obloquy- the man who attempts to palliate a misrepresentation or the man who exposes it?"<sup>218</sup>

It is difficult to say how or even when the feud between Hay and the *Times Literary Supplement* ended. The last reference to *A Chain of Error* in the journal was Hay's letter of April 19, 1928, to which no answer was ever published by the journal. There do not appear to be any archives of correspondence sent to the TLS, and a search of Malcolm Hay's papers at the University of Aberdeen did not reveal anything between him and the journal that had not been already published. From the lack of evidence at this time of writing, the *Times Literary Supplement* seemingly chose not to expend further time and resources answering Hay.

Nevertheless, this literary feud was not limited to Hay or the *Times Literary Supplement*. On the contrary, it was reported in different papers, many sympathetic to Hay's cause. The *Aberdeen Press and Journal*, which, as noted above, contained one of the first reviews of the book, described the controversy the TLS raised in its April 2 issue, noting that "Major Hay's criticisms are not answered in detail" and quoted from the *Catholic Times* as saying, "The review in many ways an astounding one, for it does not touch upon any matter of detail, it does not attempt to show where the author is wrong. It is just the lifting up of the eyes at so much naughtiness between two covers."<sup>219</sup>

The Catholic newspaper *The Universe* also wrote a lengthy rebuttal of the TLS review on April 13. The editor began with a disclaimer that pseudohistory and poorly researched propaganda would only reflect poorly on Catholic writers, that Catholic clergy such as Abbot Sir David Hunter-Blair, Brother Martingale S.J. and others have spoken out against such problematic scholarship, and that despite having every reason to condemn the books, Graham

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<sup>218</sup> Malcolm Vivian Hay, "A Chain of Error," *Times Literary Supplement*, April 19, 1928, 290.

<sup>219</sup> "'A Chain of Error.' Views for and against the Book." *Aberdeen Journal*. April 2, 1928.

and the *Church Times* did praise the book though with qualifications. However, the *Times Literary Supplement*, whose stature the editor described as “an impartial tribunal to which authors can send their work for judgement”, had “grossly mis-read [sic] the whole purpose of [Hay]. It regards the work as a ‘demand for a return to the pursuit of history as a confessional and polemical weapon.’ That the book certainly is not.”<sup>220</sup> The reviewer then described the book’s true purpose: to tell the mishandling of Scottish history by authors with a very sectarian, pro-Protestant and anti-Catholic bias, and those historians who copied these sectarian claims uncritically. They concluded, “*The Times Literary Supplement* is not ashamed, in this twentieth century, to continue this policy of misrepresentation of facts and to misinterpret the work of Colonel [sic] Hay, who would set the thinking world right. It is un-English.”<sup>221</sup>

In Northern Ireland, the *Irish News* also commented on the controversy, again from a pro-Catholic perspective. Its summation of the book, and controversy, is done in a very informal, sarcastic manner: for example, when discussing the eponymous “chains of error”, uses the fictional example with names “Mister Micklebeans” and “Alickson... Professor of Choctaw Phrenology”. The editor wrote that the author of the TLS review as a “very angry and nervous man” who feared that *A Chain of Error*’s hypothetical reader would “take up the cudgel and set about the heads of hitherto-beloved idols”; however “no one has yet shown me a reasoned refutation of Major Hay’s carefully connected arguments and reasonings”.<sup>222</sup> The

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<sup>220</sup> “A ‘Chain of Error,’” *The Universe*, April 13, 1928.

<sup>221</sup> “A ‘Chain of Error,’” *The Universe*, April 13, 1928.

<sup>222</sup> “Major M.V. Hay’s Book Creates Ferment in Britain,” *Irish News and Belfast Morning News*, April 28, 1928.

paper, described by Thomas Mor as being pro-Irish nationalist in its viewpoints,<sup>223</sup> attests to an interest and sympathy for Hay's cause in the island of Ireland.

The *Scottish Historical Review* also received negative reactions to its hostile book review. In its next and final issue, July 1928, it posted a response to the readers who wrote letters of protest to the journal in response to the review in question, such as "J. Fraser, Jesus College, Oxford, Mr. J. R. N. Macphail, K.C., Sir Bruce Seton, Bart., Sir D. O. Hunter-Blair, Bart., and Mr. Douglas Simpson". I have made several attempts to locate them without success and cannot comment on their contents except for what is already published. The rest of the article merely notes that many readers of the paper found the review to be an unfair summary of Hay's book.

Major Hay has shown beyond the possibility of quibbling that a number of documents of the greatest importance for early Scottish History have been consistently misrepresented by historians'; and that 'in regard to some features in the early history of Scotland, writers on the subject have established and followed a tradition which has no support in the known facts.'<sup>224</sup>

This was the journal's last issue until it was revived after World War II; an article from the *Glasgow Herald* cited declining readership and sales and a lack of staff as the primary reason for its disbandment.<sup>225</sup> It may be that the journal lacked the space and resources to print the articles; the editors did not want to publicly publish criticism of their journal or a

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<sup>223</sup> Thomas Mohr, "The Irish Media and the Foundation of the Irish State on 6 December 1922," *Irish Studies Review* 31, no. 2 (April 3, 2023): 211–42, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09670882.2023.2198636>.

<sup>224</sup> "Notes and Communications," *Scottish Historical Review* 25, no. 100 (July 1928): 377–400, <https://doi.org/https://www.jstor.org/stable/25525904>, 379.

<sup>225</sup> "After Twenty Five Years: Scottish Historical Review: End of a Valued Quarterly," *The Glasgow Herald*, July 6, 1928.



combination of both. Until the letters and papers relating to the journal are re-discovered, this is, unfortunately, the extent to which the SHR review of *A Chain of Error* can be discussed.

## The Social Background and Impact of the Controversy

Malcolm Vivian Hay was not the first English writer to dispute the Proto-Protestant Thesis of Celtic Christianity. In 1906, Dom Columba Edmonds of the Fort Augustus monastery wrote *The Early Scottish Church* to debunk this notion, where he complained that “[Protestants] are engaged in a perpetual and pathetic search for a connecting link with the ancient Church of this land, to disprove the fact that they owe their origin to political if not to unworthy agencies”.<sup>226</sup> In its preface, the Bishop of Aberdeen cited Dom Edmonds as an important Catholic apologist in this respect.<sup>227</sup> Despite this reputation, his work is not mentioned in *A Chain of Error*. Much of the career of Dom Louis Gougaud, a Catholic priest of the Benedictine Order, was dedicated to discrediting Protestant claims to the Celtic Church, including his *Christianity in Celtic Lands*, published in 1911; however, this was not published in English, though Hay did cite this as a source in the bibliography to *A Chain of Error*. A Presbyterian minister, J.C. MacNaught, published *The Celtic Church and the See of Peter*, which asserted that the Celtic Christians were a part of the Roman Catholic Church in 1927. While the book was published too late to be a substantial source of evidence for *A Chain of Error*, Hay wrote, “by this writer, the chain of error has been broken” in praise of it.<sup>228</sup>

Nevertheless, out of these authors, Hay generated significant controversy around himself. This controversy was grounded in a significant shift in how history in the United Kingdom was practised and the social crises of its time. More than a book about historical

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<sup>226</sup> Columba Edmonds. *The Early Scottish Church: Its Doctrine and Discipline*. (Edinburgh, UK: Sands & Co., 1906), 4.

<sup>227</sup> Edmonds, *Early Scottish Church*, xii.

<sup>228</sup> Hay, *Chain of Error*, 206.

misconceptions, *A Chain of Error* is an unorthodox attack on deeply held concepts and individuals dear to Scottish identity, especially as re-asserted by more sectarian ultranationalists such as the authors of the *Menace*.

At the time of *A Chain of Error*'s publication, the practice of history in the United Kingdom was undergoing a significant change. From a purely theoretical point of view, the most important of these changes was the decline of the "Whig" school of history. This was the result of the impact of school of historiography practised on much of the European continent and in the United States and which began in Germany in the early 19th century with Leopold von Ranke. In contrast to previous historians, who regarded the study of history primarily as a vehicle to instruct those in the present in other topics (such as military science), Ranke believed that they should be as objective as possible to reconstruct the past "as it essentially occurred", as he wrote in the preface to his *The History of the Latin and Teutonic Peoples*.<sup>229</sup> To this end, historians should not rely on what past historians had already written when writing new histories, but should draw as much as possible on primary documents, such as diaries, letters, and memoirs. In Ranke's vision, the study of history was to be a formal science based on empirical research and "the perception of the particular", not a form of knowledge that was to be gained "through abstraction", such as philosophy or mathematics, and as much as possible he wished for the latter type of knowledge production to be absent in historiography.<sup>230</sup>

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<sup>229</sup> Bentley, *Modern Historiography*, 37.

<sup>230</sup> Georg G Iggers, "The Professionalization of Historical Studies and the Guiding Assumptions of Modern Historical Thought," in *A Companion to Western Historical Thought*, ed. Lloyd S Kramer (Malden, MS: Blackwell, 2012). Kindle.

However, it must also be stated that Ranke's interpretation of history was deeply influenced by romanticism and his Lutheran faith, such as his belief that European history was that of inherently different civilisations: "Latin" and "Teutonic".<sup>231</sup> According to him, historical research was not to be conducted by a "tabula rasa" who would draw abstract conclusions from particular examples, but interpreted according to abstract spiritual ideas. His emphasis on objectivity and his refusal to judge past states and regimes also stemmed from a belief that states were "spiritual entities" which carried out God's divine plan according to the different circumstances in which they found themselves. According to Ranke, existence of multiple, conflicting states did not exist in themselves as a purely positive thinker may assume but were manifestations of the singular God of Christianity.<sup>232</sup>

Nevertheless, it was Ranke's positivist principles that greatly impacted the professional study of history, shaping the formation of the field as we know it today. He and other historians of the day were the first to apply a process of "scientisation" to the study of history, guided by biologists such as Carolus Linnaeus, Jean-Baptiste Lamarck, and Charles Darwin. These historians saw human society as guided by specific laws which could be discovered by studying the past. In France, the pioneer of this new historical method was François Guizot, who compared history to an autopsy, where one had to investigate the facts involved in a recorded case and the particulars of a historical event to determine the laws that operated behind them like how practitioners of autopsy study anatomy and physiology to determine the cause of death in a patient.<sup>233</sup> Despite the religious romanticism of Ranke and his

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<sup>231</sup> Bentley, *Modern Historiography*, 38.

<sup>232</sup> Ernst Breisach, *Historiography: Ancient, Medieval and Modern*, 2nd ed. (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 233-4.

<sup>233</sup> Michael Bentley. *Modern historiography: An introduction*. London, UK: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2015, 44-5.

contemporaries, his vision of an empirically driven study of history derived from researching primary sources and drawing conclusions from the above was revolutionary. It cannot be emphasised enough that the historical method we know today derives from their contributions to historical practice.

Rankean historiography was not adapted wholesale in the United Kingdom, where a tradition known as the Whig school was already well established, which was both similar and different in many respects to the works of Ranke and his students. Whig historiography saw history as unfolding within the guiding ideology of classical liberalism.<sup>234</sup> In this respect, Whig historiography was very typical of historiographical schools of this period, which saw regarded history as unfolding with a final goal; a concept borrowed from certain interpretations of Charles Darwin's theory of evolution.<sup>235</sup> According to this narrative, history was a series of events that culminated in the creation of the modern British nation-state, and Whig historians attempted to demonstrate that the seeds of the modern United Kingdom had been formed in the Norman and Anglo-Saxon period. These histories were a British parallel to Ranke's belief in a Teutonic civilisation that had existed since antiquity. Rivals to the proto-British nation and the ruling House of Hanover, such as the Stuart kings, were vilified as tyrants. Like Ranke, who believed in the state as an instrument of divine will, Whig historians, many of whom were Anglican clergy, imparted a deep sense of religiosity to their histories. In these texts, the coming of the modern British constitution was heralded in language that expressed an intense gratitude to God for the coming of the modern British

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<sup>234</sup> P. B. M. Blaas, *Continuity and Anachronism: Parliamentary and Constitutional Development in Whig Historiography and in the Anti-Whig Reaction Between 1890 and 1930* (The Hague, Netherlands: Nijhoff, 1978), 15-24.

<sup>235</sup> Michael Ruse, "The Philosophy of Evolutionary Theory," in *A Companion to the Philosophy of History and Historiography*, ed. Aviezer Tucker (Chichester, UK: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2009), 307-17, 310-13.

state. An intense sectarianism was also present in this school of thought, with the Reformation and the creation of the Anglican Church framed as critical milestones in British development.<sup>236</sup>

However, there remained critical differences between the Whig and Rankean schools of history, which became more apparent after the death of Ranke in 1886. The British historians tended to focus on constitutional history following its emphasis on British liberty, tracing it back to the Magna Carta, the Witagemots of the Anglo Saxons, and so forth<sup>237</sup> This emphasis on law and constitutional structures also emphasised large structures “fabricated coral-like, by countless imperceptible creatures”, instead of individual testimonies favoured by Rankean historians.<sup>238</sup> However, the greatest difference between the two historiographies was the Rankean belief in objectivity and empiricism. Paradoxically, Ranke’s greatest legacy was not his spiritual romanticism, but the empirical side of his work, such as the manner he made his students reconstruct the past from primary documents in archives, and assessing their reliability based on their contexts. This has led to a misconception of Ranke as a pure positivist in his outlook.<sup>239</sup> It was this emphasis on neutrality and objectivity which was ignored by the majority Whig historians, and subsequently became the subject of criticism from the 1890s onwards. These historians continued to hold onto a teleological view of history, as well as a presentist manner of interpretation which both overemphasised

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<sup>236</sup> Bentley, *Modern Historiography*, 62-6.

<sup>237</sup> Bentley, *Modern Historiography*, 62-3.

<sup>238</sup> Bentley, *Modern Historiography*, 70.

<sup>239</sup> Ernst Breisach, *Historiography: Ancient, Medieval and Modern*, 2nd ed. (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 233.

continuities between the past and present and a deterministic sense<sup>240</sup> The historian Herbert Butterfield, who coined the term “Whig history” in 1931, criticized Whig historians who “study the past for the sake of the present”, and simplified complex topics for the sake of producing morals.<sup>241</sup> Butterfield objected to their misuse of historical materials and argued, like Ranke, that the past needed to be seen in its terms, not by the present standards.<sup>242</sup> It was the subject of *A Chain of Error* four years earlier, though Malcolm Vivian Hay focused his arguments more on sectarianism than the general language of presentism.

The professional culture of historians as a social group also differed between Germany and Britain. In Germany, most historians had already switched to the practice of history as a formal profession carried out in universities by professors, as opposed to “antiquarians” or gentleman scholars who were typically educated members of the upper class and carried out research as an aristocratic pastime. This model began in the early 19th century after the Napoleonic Wars when the old aristocracies of Europe were given away to societies dominated by the middle class, and the French restructured German university systems. With these changes came calls for a new educational paradigm spearheaded by reformers like Wilhelm von Humboldt, a linguist and philosopher who was the brother of the explorer Alexander von Humboldt. Wilhelm von Humboldt was tasked with reforming the Prussian education system in 1809 after the defeat of the Kingdom of Prussia by France.<sup>243</sup> Although

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<sup>240</sup> P. B. M. Blaas, *Continuity and Anachronism: Parliamentary and Constitutional Development in Whig Historiography and in the Anti-Whig Reaction Between 1890 and 1930* (The Hague, Netherlands: Nijhoff, 1978), xii.

<sup>241</sup> Bentley, *Modern Historiography*, 65.

<sup>242</sup> Bentley, *Modern Historiography*, 62-3.

<sup>243</sup> Vincent Barnett, Vincent. "Humboldt, Alexander and Wilhelm von." *Europe 1789-1914: Encyclopedia of the Age of Industry and Empire*, edited by John Merriman and Jay Winter, vol. 2, Charles Scribner's Sons, 2006,

he would resign his post a year later, becoming the Prussian ambassador to Vienna, his philosophy of education greatly impacted the study of arts and sciences in the 19th century, including the development of historiography. He believed that instead of being vocational schools for lawyers, doctors and priests, universities should cultivate the intellectual development of their new middle-class students, a process known in German as *Bildung*, and evolve with modernity. To ensure this, universities would not just be teaching institutions but also centres of research.<sup>244</sup>

Humboldt's most significant impact on general studies was their professionalisation, and history was no exception. Starting from Germany and radiating outward in the second half of the 19th century, history became a job whose practitioners required formal education and degrees as a professional license and proof of their training. The highest university degree, the doctorate, would no longer be an honorary award, but a research degree whose recipients had to contribute positively to the study of their chosen field. In addition, a second research degree in Germany, the Habilitation, was required to teach at universities. By the last third of the century, academic journals of history, distinguished from other journals by their primary audience being professional historians trained in universities on the German model, became the primary medium where history literature was published in various countries. Examples included the *American Historical Review*, the *English Historical Review*, and the *Scottish Historical Review*, which posted the infamous review of *A Chain of Error*.

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pp. 1095-1098. Gale eBooks,  
[link.gale.com/apps/doc/CX3446900390/GVRL?u=utoronto\\_main&sid=bookmark-GVRL&xid=40bb430d](https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/CX3446900390/GVRL?u=utoronto_main&sid=bookmark-GVRL&xid=40bb430d).  
Accessed 14 Nov. 2023.

<sup>244</sup> George G Iggers, Georg G. “The Professionalization of Historical Studies and the Guiding Assumptions of Modern Historical Thought.” In *A Companion to Western Historical Thought*, edited by Lloyd S Kramer. Malden, MS: Blackwell, 2012. Kindle



These journals would present the findings of historical researchers to their fellow academics, much like how science journals published the research of members of the hard sciences such as biology, astronomy, and physics. Reviews of recently published history books would also be presented in journals, where journal editors could appraise their fellow historians' work and contributions to the historical sphere. New associations of these professional historians could attend annual meetings and share their ideas, such as the American Historical Association. Finally, there were international congresses where historians could join scholars from different countries.<sup>245</sup>

In contrast to continental Europe and the United States, the United Kingdom remained very conservative in its study and practice of history and other academic research fields. The gentry and aristocracy retained their hold on the British academic world at the expense of the middle classes, and the "ancient universities" of Oxford and Cambridge continued to cater to them.<sup>246</sup> Hence, when the British universities did attempt to adopt the German model of professionalization, the process was slow and piecemeal. Oxford lacked a faculty of history until 1850, and it wasn't until 1872 that this faculty, then a part of the department of law, became independent. Written exams in classics and mathematics were only introduced in 1800, and the medieval tradition of questioning students one by one orally in examinations only abandoned in 1827. The process of adopting new German learning styles was also hindered as, during this period, Oxford and Cambridge continued teaching students in small groups of tutors and lecturers, who, in turn, needed to be trained in history themselves before they could teach their students. Due to this slow professionalisation, most British historians,

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<sup>245</sup> Iggers, *The Professionalization of Historical Studies*. Kindle.

<sup>246</sup> Bentley, *Modern Historiography*, 79-80.

such as Acton, either attended university very late compared to their continental equivalents, if at all.<sup>247</sup>

By the early 20th century, the practice of history remained divided between the professional, German-style historians and the more informal antiquarians such as Malcolm Hay. The study and practice of history were still dominated by Oxford and Cambridge and their ancient traditions, and actual research fields mostly remained confined to English history in the Middle Ages. It was only in the early 20th century that Oxford introduced a PhD.<sup>248</sup> This insularity and conservatism were heavily criticised by Hay in *A Chain of Error in Scottish History*, where he vigorously attacked professional historians as being tied to their job and being unwilling to make controversial statements for fear of hurting their careers, as opposed to antiquarians like himself, who could speak freely due to their independent wealth.<sup>249</sup>

Hay was not alone in antiquarian critics of professional university historians during the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. Another critic, C.V. Wedgwood, writing in 1946, included a jeremiad on the study of history in her time in *Velvet Studies*, writing, “The greater number of historical writers failed entirely to understand what was expected of them. They turned their faces away from their audience and towards their subject, turned deliberately from the present to the past.”<sup>250</sup> Hay’s argument, some twenty years before, touched on similar points to Wedgwood’s, such as professional preoccupation causing historians to neglect public

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<sup>247</sup> John Kenyon. *The history men: The historical profession in England since the Renaissance*. London, UK: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1993, 145

<sup>248</sup> Kenyon, *History Men*, 271-3.

<sup>249</sup> Hay, *Chain of Error*, 192-3.

<sup>250</sup> C.V. Wedgwood. *Velvet Studies*. London, UK: Jonathan Cape, 1946, 155, quoted in John Kenyon. *The History men: The Historical Profession in England since the Renaissance*. London, UK: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1993, 272.

engagement. However, what Hay was arguing was that university historians were too afraid of scandal, which could lead to the university leadership deciding to fire them. This is an unusual argument, particularly in respect to the security of tenured or sinecured positions many university professors often have; particularly as Hay implies that antiquarians such as himself in this regard are more Rankean than professionals in that they do not have to worry if their study of the past leads to controversial results or not.

The career of Malcolm Hay himself, who did not attend university, is an excellent illustration of the conservatism of the British historical field. He and many other historians in the early 20th century were also “amateurs” or “antiquarians”, and until the 1920s, the two had primarily coexisted in peace.<sup>251</sup> Of the most recent historians of Celtic Christianity in Scotland at the time *A Chain of Error* was published, Archibald Scott was a Free Church minister, as noted above. Lucy Menzies had no formal higher education other than a finishing school she attended when she was 15, and worked professionally as a literary executor, only receiving an honorary doctorate from the University of Saint Andrews in 1954.<sup>252</sup>

In certain respects, working as an antiquarian did free Malcolm Hay from the limitations existing in Scottish universities at the time, such as a lack of resources to carry out research. When Hay began his career, the history faculties in Scotland’s universities had only been recently formed in the 1890s. The first Professor of History at the University of Aberdeen was appointed in 1898. Second, these faculties were not dedicated to research but to teaching students, and their recent formation meant that the number of professors and students was limited. In 1913, only 11% of Aberdeen’s students were enrolled in a history

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<sup>251</sup> Kenyon, *History Men*, 271.

<sup>252</sup> William P. Hyland, “Lucy Menzies (1882 to 1954) and the Christian Ideal of Sanctity in Medieval Scotland.” *Scottish Episcopal Institute Journal* 5, no. 4 (December 2021), 2.

course, and only one student received a history degree from Aberdeen in 1926 when *A Chain of Error* was published. Across Scotland, the picture was similar. In 1928, 2 years after *A Chain of Error* was published, less than 5% of honours degrees were in history. Similarly, the faculty size at Aberdeen before 1940 peaked at five in 1939. Any prospective historian wishing to become a professional researcher had to travel to France or Germany to study.<sup>253</sup> Finally, this study of history in Scotland centred around mediaeval English law, making the universities ill-suited for research into Scottish history.<sup>254</sup> As an independently wealthy outsider with time to research Hay could travel to different other libraries and archives, and was not tied down to teaching students as were professors in Scottish universities at the time. Indeed, in *A Chain of Error*, Hay accused the university professors of being insufficiently Rankean in their conduct and research methodology; believing that not only was antiquarianism superior for its supposed freedom to pursue research, but also that it could be held to a Rankean standard better than university research.

Regardless of the personal details of Hay's career and how it illustrated the state of flux in British historiography, the question remains of how it got to the state that *A Chain of Error* was able to raise controversy. The answer to that question is that the First World War, with its widespread death and destruction, proved to be a major disruption to the capitalist, imperialist economic system that Britain depended on pre-war and the liberal ideology that supported it— an ideology that also included the Whig school of history. A fundamental bedrock of liberalism in the 19th century was a belief in human progress tied to science, education, and implicitly capitalism and industrialisation. Many Victorian thinkers held that

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<sup>253</sup> Robert Anderson. "The Development of History Teaching in the Scottish Universities, 1894–1939." *Journal of Scottish Historical Studies* 32, no. 1 (2012): 50–73. <https://doi.org/10.3366/jshs.2012.0035>, 50-60.

<sup>254</sup> Kenyon, *History Men*, 270.

human nature was inherently progressive, though human instincts tended towards “base” impulses such as violence and emotion. Nevertheless, with proper education, humans could be taught to become “civilised”, overcoming these instincts through reason. Beyond this belief in individual self-improvement, human history was also regarded as a trajectory from “savagery”, when humans were dominated by violent instinct, to civilisation.<sup>255</sup>

It is difficult not to read a highly imperialist bent to this classical liberal notion of human progress, and this is because liberalism was an ideology closely entangled with 19<sup>th</sup>-century colonial empires and the New Imperialism. The “civilisation” that humanity was progressing towards inevitably meant Western European civilisation, dominated by the liberal middle class and its Enlightenment values.<sup>256</sup> Colonial officials such as Alfred Lord Milner saw Britain as the most superior nation, which had a duty to “civilise” other societies as part of this inevitable human progress.<sup>257</sup> At its most extreme, this ideology of human progress could lead to atrocities, such as the forcing of over 150 000 Native Canadian children into residential schools with the intention of destroying their culture and way of life. The colonisers justified the process by claiming that they were part of a “civilising mission” to bring native cultures into the fold of modernity.<sup>258</sup>

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<sup>255</sup> George W. Stocking, *Victorian Anthropology* (Toronto, ON: The Free Press, 1987), 36.

<sup>256</sup> Stocking, *Victorian Anthropology*, 36.

<sup>257</sup> Muhamad Ali, *Islam and Colonialism: Becoming Modern in Indonesia and Malaya* (Edinburgh, UK: Edinburgh University Press, 2016), 91-2.

<sup>258</sup> Phil Fontaine and Aimée Craft, eds., *Knock on the Door: The Essential History of Residential Schools From the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, Edited and Abridged* (Winnipeg, MB: University of Manitoba Press, 2019),

[https://www.google.ca/books/edition/A\\_Knock\\_on\\_the\\_Door/3f4wCwAAQBAJ?hl=en&gbpv=0](https://www.google.ca/books/edition/A_Knock_on_the_Door/3f4wCwAAQBAJ?hl=en&gbpv=0), Intro, chap 1.

It is here that the Whig school of history comes into play. As noted above, Whig historians deeply emphasised history as a trajectory from the “savagery” of antiquity and the supposed tyranny and ignorance of the Middle Ages to the enlightened present, where people were free and equal under “British liberty”. As a historiographical school, the Whigs were most concerned with justifying the British state as it was developing in the mid-19th century. To do so, they depicted history as a teleological series of events leading up to the UK’s creation. This process was also tied into liberalism, with the United Kingdom epitomising a free society. In this manner, the Whig school was associated deeply with liberal notions of human progress by depicting history as a series of events where people became more civilised, rational, liberal, and Protestant.<sup>259</sup>

It was this liberal capitalism that came into a crisis with the First World War. The extreme violence engendered by the war seriously put into question the concept that humanity was progressing towards liberty and prosperity and that Western Europe was the zenith of human civilisation. Economically, liberalism, which argued for free markets, became side-lined due to state intervention during the war.<sup>260</sup> The war also shattered previously held notions of civilisation, with the United States (which did not enter the war until 1917) in particular seeing the slaughter in Europe as a mass atrocity that degraded the “civilised” inhabitants of the continent into a state of “savagery”, reversing the order of human history as one that was marching towards progress that was widely held in the 19th

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<sup>259</sup> Michael Ruse, “The Philosophy of Evolutionary Theory,” essay, in *A Companion to the Philosophy of History and Historiography*, ed. Aviezer Tucker (Chichester, UK: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2009), 307–17, 310–13.

<sup>260</sup> Hew Strachan, ed., *World War I: A History* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1999), 7.

century.<sup>261</sup> To reduce the cognitive dissonance of slaughtering fellow white Europeans, propagandists on both sides attempted to narrow the reach of civilisation to their side. Entente propagandists cited atrocities committed in Belgium as proof that the Germans were savages whose militarism was inherently opposed to Western civilisation. The use of hundreds of thousands of colonial troops from Asia and Africa in a war between Europeans also put into question notions of European superiority towards these peoples, which German propagandists used as proof of the very savagery of the Entente powers.<sup>262</sup> The argument that World War I was a war between liberalism and tyranny could additionally not justify why the semi-absolute Russian Empire was a member of the Entente.<sup>263</sup>

Subsequently, World War I caused deep fractures in Europe's intellectual world, combined with disillusionment with the liberal order. The new generation of modernists defied pre-war assumptions of the inevitability of progress and the superiority of Western civilisation, seeing the change of the 20th century with deep scepticism or outright hostility. In the creative realm, this led to new trends in art, literature, and music, such as atonal music, surrealism and the experimental genres of literature, all given the label modernist.<sup>264</sup> The search for meaning and identity in the wake of the collapse of classical liberalism also entailed a desire for a new socioeconomic system. This disillusionment with classical liberalism resulted in the creation or popularisation of both radical left and right wing movements. The supporters of different ideologies also justified their beliefs using specific

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<sup>261</sup> David W Seitz, *World War I, Mass Death, and the Birth of the Modern Us Soldier: A Rhetorical History* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2020), 15.

<sup>262</sup> Nicholas John Cull, David Holbrook Culbert, and David Welch, *Propaganda and Mass Persuasion: A Historical Encyclopaedia, 1500 to the Present* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2003), 24-5.

<sup>263</sup> Strachan, *World War I*, 7.

<sup>264</sup> James Ciment, *Encyclopaedia of the Jazz Age: From the End of World War I to the Great Crash* (Routledge, n.d.).

interpretations of history, giving rise to new historiographical schools or popularising existing ones.

On the left, socialist politicians criticised liberalism as the ideology of capitalism. As early as 1913, Vladimir Lenin published *The Separation of Liberalism from Democracy*, in which he regarded liberalism as the class consciousness of the bourgeoisie, and as a tool of capitalist class and imperialists which was inimical to democracy and worker self-government.<sup>265</sup> The Russian Revolution in 1917, which resulted in the creation of the Soviet Union under Lenin, provided an example to the world of an alternative to capitalism. Yet even before this event, a significant left-wing movement had been brewing in Britain. As noted above, a powerful socialist movement began growing in Scotland during World War I to protect any improvements to working conditions gained during the war. As early as 1915, workers in Glasgow held a Rent Strike to protest overpriced housing, and it was during this period that the Clyde Valley gained its nickname, Red Clyde.<sup>266</sup> In the wake of the collapse and merger of the Liberal Party with the Conservative Party, Labour became the latter's largest political competitor.<sup>267</sup>

The far right also gained significant currency in this period, with leaders such as Adolf Hitler and Benito Mussolini promising their followers that they would protect them from socialism. The most important movement to merge from the right wing in this period was fascism, defined by the historian Roger Griffin as “palingenetic ultranationalism”, or a form

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<sup>265</sup> Vladimir Lenin and George Hanna, “The Separation of Liberalism from Democracy,” in *Lenin Collected Works*, vol. 19 (Moscow, USSR: 1977, 1977), 302–4, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1913/aug/11.htm>.

<sup>266</sup> Wormald, *Scotland*, 204.

<sup>267</sup> McKibbin, Ross. *Parties and People: England 1914-1951*. (United Kingdom: OUP Oxford, 2010), 34-5.



of extreme nationalism based on a myth of national rebirth after a period of degeneration.<sup>268</sup>

In the United Kingdom, there were fascist groups such as Oswald Moseley's British Union of Fascists present. Still, they did not gain significant popularity, unlike in places such as Italy and Germany, or France where fascists unsuccessfully attempted to overthrow the government in 1934. Nevertheless, ultranationalism in Britain did manifest in forms such as the increased anti-Catholic sectarianism in Scotland after the First World War, as noted before. The Menace report did discuss the Irish immigrants in Scotland in highly racialised terms as an existential threat to the Scottish nation. During this period, John White, moderator of the Church of Scotland, called for a "racially pure" Scottish nation using language like that used by fascist dictators.<sup>269</sup> However, while figures like John White gained great power and influence in this period, they ultimately did not convince the public of their ideals.<sup>270</sup>

One historian on the right who was deeply critical of liberalism was the German Oswald Spengler who attacked liberal democracy in his magnum opus *The Decline of the West*. Spengler criticised teleological views of history like Whig historiography and instead posited that societies were like living beings that lived and died. Here, Spengler attacked democracy as being a form of plutocracy, which was inherently unstable and evolving towards dictatorship, or "Caesarism" as he called it. This worldview stemmed from a deeply reactionary ideology which held lower classes as incapable of driving history, but only priests and aristocrats. Caesarism, according to Spengler, was the rule of an apolitical strongman, or

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<sup>268</sup> Roger Griffin, *The Nature of Fascism* (London, UK: Routledge, 2015), 38-9.

<sup>269</sup> Michael Meighan, *Glasgow: A History* (Stroud, UK: Amberley, 2015).

<sup>270</sup> Steve Bruce, *Scottish Gods: Religion in Modern Scotland, 1900-2012* (Edinburgh, UK: Edinburgh University Press, 2016).

”Caesar”, whom he predicted would dissolve plutocratic democracy and with it, Western civilisation.<sup>271</sup> Consequently, Spengler was a staunch opponent of the Weimar Republic, and advocated its overthrow and replacement by a dictatorship capable of bringing about the western Caesar.<sup>272</sup> He deeply admired Benito Mussolini as a proto-Caesar who stood above the masses and ruled the country in his own right, and Mussolini considered him a German ally in return. His relationship to Nazism is complicated, with him welcoming and criticizing the rise of Hitler, but these critiques stemmed from Spengler’s scepticism as to what degree Hitler could bring about the former’s eschatological “Caesar”.<sup>273</sup>

Unlike the communists, neither fascists nor other members of the far right in Great Britain existed in large enough numbers for a new historiographical school to coalesce around their ideology. However, nationalists and ultranationalists did use historical rhetoric drawing on the past to legitimatise the nation-state, such as Archibald Scott in the previously mentioned Pictish Nation. In Scott’s case, it must again be emphasised that there is a solid nationalist undertone of a congregationalist, Pictish “volk” united by religion (in this case, the idealised Celtic Church) that was opposed by foreign powers such as the Catholic Church.<sup>274</sup>

However, for most people, the communist and fascist alternatives to liberal capitalism were too radical to be feasible, even if there was to be no one replacement for the pre-war Gladstonian liberalism. Before World War I, party alignments in Britain did not neatly follow a class interest but often traced trans-class, sectarian lines, with Church of England voters supporting the Conservative Party and non-conformists supporting the Liberal Party.

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<sup>271</sup> Ben Lewis, *Oswald Spengler and the Politics of Decline* (New York City, NY: Berghahn Books, Incorporated, 2022), 42-3, 48, 51.

<sup>272</sup> Ben Lewis, Spengler, 138-9.

<sup>273</sup> Ben Lewis, *Spengler*, 157-8.

<sup>274</sup> Bradley, *Celtic Christianity*, 174-6.

However, the intensified class conflict during and after the war, while disintegrating the Liberal Party, did not lead to a revolution like Russia or fascism like Italy. Rather, radicalised working classes (particularly younger people) began supporting Labour and its socialist policies. Meanwhile, by integrating the middle classes, the Conservative Party became the party of both the aristocracy and the industrial and commercial middle classes, as well as large segments of a non-radicalised working class which primarily consisted of voters who came of age before the war. In practice, this meant the absorption of the Liberal Party that had become fragmented by power struggles in the aftermath of the First World War. This did not please many veterans of the Liberal Party, who often resigned from politics rather than join their opponents.<sup>275</sup>

Other than the Labour Party, the fact that the more radical Communist and Fascist movements did not make much headway in Britain does not take away the threat it seemed to pose to the broader liberal democracy to people at the time. Compton Mackenzie, writing from a conservative perspective, voiced his concern about the effect these movements could play in disrupting the status quo in *Catholicism and Scotland*.<sup>276</sup>

Refuse the Sister of the Sacred Heart, refuse the Marist Brother, refuse the Benedictine whose founder was preserving Christianity a thousand years before the Established Church of Scotland was dreamed of, refuse the men and women whose lives have been dedicated exclusively to the service of Almighty God; but admit the psychological quack, admit the sexual faddist with his Freudian obsessions, admit the theophobe [i.e. atheist] communist to corrupt with his godlessness the mind of Scottish youth, admit

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<sup>275</sup> Ross McKibbin, *Parties and People: England 1914-1951* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2011), 91-6.

<sup>276</sup> Compton Mackenzie, *Catholicism and Scotland* (London, UK: Routledge, 1936), 168-9.

even Satan himself, who after all can cite Scripture to his purpose as well as John Knox and who can fairly be regarded as the first protestant of all.<sup>277</sup>

From a historiographical point of view, the decline of the Whig school can be considered synonymous with the decline of classical liberalism. However, from Butterfield's critique of the Whig School and the controversies in church history, such as those begun by Scott and Hay, it does seem that there was a significant amount of soul-searching going on as the Whig approach became increasingly discredited. Archibald Scott promoted new figureheads to be admired by Scottish Nationalists. At the same time, Malcolm Hay was an iconoclast who criticised Protestant-centric Whig school and its heroes such as Knox, Walter Scott and others.

The fact that Malcolm Hay was writing at this time cannot be over-emphasised. Many elements of his biography and career make sense when put into the light of the disintegration of not only classical liberal ideology and its ideological and sectarian underpinnings but also the decline of the Liberal Party as an actual institution. This includes the writing and publication of *A Chain of Error in Scottish History*. Malcolm's widow, Alice Ivy Hay, noted that "he voted Liberal at all elections", and although he never formally ran for any office, he was very interested in politics before the First World War. During this period, Hay made several public speeches on "the subject of want and poverty", and wrote letters to *The British Review* and *Aberdeen Daily Journal* on subjects such as the Catholic Church in Quebec.<sup>278</sup>

His pre-war interest in party politics seemed to have dissipated in the 1920s and 30s. As noted above, Hay did not engage in any political action, as he did before the First World War,

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<sup>277</sup> Mackenzie, *Catholicism and Scotland* 168-9.

<sup>278</sup> Hay, *Valiant for Truth*, 44-6.

but dedicated himself almost wholly to studying history. This trajectory appears to be very typical of Liberal politicians, as noted by the historian of interwar Britain Ross McKibbin:

For many of the older generation of Liberals, that meant a withdrawal from active politics since ‘as one of them said, they could not accept “that in fighting Conservatives [they] had been wasting [their] time.”<sup>279</sup>

The liberals who did not abandon politics entirely often joined the Conservative Party in part due to a broader acceptance of non-conforming Protestants in its ranks. This was facilitated in part by Conservative leader Stanley Baldwin’s “own easy-going Anglicanism, a kind of ecumenical Protestantism made him an honorary nonconformist and eased the transition.”<sup>280</sup> It must be noted here that the sectarian aspects of party politics played a role in Hay’s career. However ecumenical the new Conservatism Protestantism was towards non-conformists, it was not as welcoming to Roman Catholics. Indeed, often sectarian anti-Catholics, such as those who joined the Orange Order, had links to the Conservative Party from as early as the Edwardian period up until the 1970s, making this party an unacceptable choice for Catholics like Hay.<sup>281</sup> Indeed, the breakdown of the Liberal Party prompted Hay to defend Catholic interests.

The first and most obvious target for *A Chain of Error* was the new Conservative, pan-Protestant establishment, which left very little room for Catholics such as himself. A key theme of *A Chain of Error* is an attack on deeply held notions of Protestant historiography and its admiration of heroes of the Reformation, such as John Knox. Contrary to Whig

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<sup>279</sup> Ross McKibbin, *Parties and People: England 1914-1951* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2011), 92.

<sup>280</sup> McKibbin, *Parties and People*, 92.

<sup>281</sup> Joseph M. Bradley, “Orangeism in Scotland: Unionism, Politics, Identity, and Football,” *Éire-Ireland* 39, no. 1 (Spring/Summer 2004): 237–61, <https://doi.org/10.1353/eir.2004.0001>.

histories, which typically portrayed the Middle Ages as a “Dark Age” of ignorance and superstition, a long theme in the first few chapters of *A Chain of Error* is the loss of learning and specialists after the Protestant Reformation, with Hay charging the reformers of removing learned Catholic specialists in Scotland with untrained loyalists to the Protestant cause.<sup>282</sup> Similarly, figures in historiography, such as Edward Gibbons and iconic Scottish writers, such as Sir Walter Scott, are also accused of systematically misrepresenting the role of Catholicism in British history. More subtle is the attack on socialism and communism, which, as noted below, was shaped by his alignment with right-wing political Catholicism that valorised the Middle Ages. In the first chapters, there is a strong emphasis on the Protestants as a revolutionary mob, like that of the Bolshevik revolution: leaders such as John Knox are portrayed negatively as manipulators of frenzied, ignorant masses who are quickly whipped up by anti-Catholic propaganda, such as that of the Madgeburg Centurions. These are stereotypes like those deployed against the Communist revolutionaries at the time.

Hay’s polemics against anti-Catholic sectarians was powerfully shaped by the decline of liberalism as a driving ideology in British politics. As noted above, with the decline of the Liberal Party also came a decline in the ideologies that supported it, such as the Whig school of historiography that would be more formally criticised four years after *A Chain of Error*’s publication by Butterfield. There was no formal Tory school of historiography. Still, as highlighted in sections of *The Menace of the Irish Race to our Scottish Nationality*, far-right ultranationalists were also wont to selectively use aspects of Whig history, such as a Catholic enemy and the transmutation of British liberty into an essence of a pan-British nation formed during the Reformation, to further their political goals.

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<sup>282</sup> Malcolm Hay, *Chain of Error*, 35-6.

It must also be noted that the decline of the Liberal Party paradoxically enabled Hay to write extended critiques of what would later be called the Whig school and its anti-Catholic biases, by freeing him from the obligation of engaging more actively in Liberal Party politics as he did before the outbreak of World War I. Likewise, although Hay himself was ideologically a Liberal Party loyalist, the Whig school, with its anti-Catholic bias, was itself the historiographical ideology of liberalism, meaning that he would have been unable to criticise it had the Liberal Party remained the force it was before the war. In contrast, the quasi-Catholic “High Church” tradition was significant in the Anglican Church before World War I. With the folding of the more radical Protestant nonconformists into the Conservative Party after the war also came the opportunity to criticise the more sectarian aspects of their ideology that would not have been politically expedient beforehand.

These are some of the most likely reasons for the controversial reception of *A Chain of Error in Scottish History*. While there were attacks on the radical left in the book, the book’s primary target was the pan-Protestant Conservative establishment and the kind of Protestant nationalism it now espoused with the folding of the radical Whigs into the Conservative Party. As noted in prior sections, much of the legitimacy of both individual Protestant Churches and the broader pan-Protestant conservative establishment came from the sectarian, nationalist origin myth of these denominations in being descended from an independent Celtic Church that opposed the Roman Catholic Church. By claiming these ancient origins, Protestants sought to gain legitimacy for their beliefs by not only tracing their beginnings to the Reformation but to the oldest Christians in Great Britain; as also noted in previous sections, some of these attempts, such as claims that the Culdees were founded in the first or second centuries AD, may come off as unconvincing to the modern eye. By this rhetoric, it

became much more difficult to claim that Protestants are mere schismatics, but instead that they are the true Christians of Great Britain, and Catholicism is an import.

This nativism was especially of interest to sectarian nationalists such as Archibald Scott. In claiming the Celtic Christians for themselves, the Protestant nationalists could assert that they alone were the ancestors of the original Christians in Britain. Sectarian anti-Catholics were keen on depicting Roman Catholics, such as the recent Irish immigrants, as being inherently other to “Germanic” British Protestants. This othering would justify the marginalisation and, in the aspiration of extremists such as John White, the ethnic cleansing of Irish Catholics from Britain. As the 1850s proved, it was straightforward for anti-Catholics to cite real and imagined Papal suppression of the “Culdees” as reasons to exclude Catholics from public life. In previous sections, it was demonstrated that waves of interest in Celtic Christianity during the 19th and early 20th centuries corresponded to periods of intensified anti-Catholic fervour, such as that of the 1850s, and the resurgence of interest and controversy around the Celtic Christians in the 1920s appears to be a continuation of the 19th century. In this respect, the anti-Catholic rhetoric went beyond merely the historiography of the Celtic Church. It became a historiography of the centuries-long conflict between Catholics and their real or imagined opponents for control of Britain, such as the Reformation, the Wars of the Three Kingdoms, and the Glorious Revolution, which required a worldview that rejected anything positive about Catholicism, the ignorance of anything that can be used against Protestantism, and the selective reading of sources to support the foregone conclusion that British Protestantism has its origins in Celtic Christianity. It was the maintenance of centuries of distortions and biases required to depict a consistently evil and corrupt Roman Catholic Church for a sectarian end that became the great “chain of error in Scottish history” that Hay so vehemently opposed.



In breaking the “chain of error”, Malcolm Hay’s concern was not only to demonstrate flaws in the historical method used deliberately by Protestant historians, but to discredit the entire Protestant nationalism that depended on the “chain” for legitimacy. Despite the officially stated goal of *A Chain of Error* being to criticise historical methodologies used by Protestant authors, there is a strong, but implicit criticism of Protestant exceptionalism that runs through the book. First, according to Hay, the people of Britain and Ireland were Catholics, and only in the 16th century did they adopt Protestantism at a significant loss to society and culture. By emphasising the damage done by the Reformation in the early chapter, he also sought to challenge the Whig thesis that history was the continual advance of progress as embodied in Protestantism, leaving it open as to whether a Protestant-dominated Britain is even ideal in the first place.

As seized upon by other, more controversial supporters of Hay, such as the editors of the *Catholic Times*, *A Chain of Error* could pave the way for a Scotland that would include religious minorities such as themselves, even if this was not a goal stated by Hay himself. To a lesser extent, this pro-Catholic project also extended to the rest of Britain, as attested by English newspapers’ interest in the book, such as the *Universe* or the *Catholic Herald*. It was this deconstruction of the standard Whig history of the conservative status quo, which depended on the upholding of the “chain of error” to maintain legitimacy. This was the primary reason why many Protestant reviewers such as that of the *Times Literary Supplement* angrily rejected it, and, if the claims are legitimate, why a Protestant press boycott was carried out against it.

Nevertheless, it must be noted that although Hay was writing as an opponent of the pan-Protestant Conservative Party in the 1950s, and despite his allegiance to the Liberal Party, Hay was not writing from the left, but the right. If Hay was a critic of the Conservative

Party, then he also made subtle, but significant attacks on socialism and other forms of modernity, as well as defences of aristocracy in *A Chain of Error*. As noted above, the book contains attacks on the Protestant reformers such as John Knox as demagogues, whipping up ignorant masses with lurid propaganda about corrupt Catholic clergy, a stereotype conservatives (not necessarily affiliated with the Conservative Party) used to caricature revolutionary movements since the French Revolution.

Likewise, his attacks on professors as being unwilling to make social critiques for fear of losing their job, as well as his praise for antiquarians like himself also contains class dimension, this time against the middle class professionals who now made up university leadership. Since antiquity, aristocracies in many societies were strongly critical of the generation of money through commerce. In contrast to the capitalist bourgeoisie, who invest money for future economic growth and then use these resources to acquire political power, pre-capitalist aristocracies acquired capital through their political power; capital which was not invested for profit, but consumed in displays of wealth.<sup>283</sup> In this manner, Hay's assertion of the superiority of the antiquarian is a defence of the study of history as a form of this conspicuous consumption that should be performed by aristocrats such as himself, not pursued as a career by the bourgeoisie.

These attacks on socialism and modernism appear to have been in part directed towards other Roman Catholics. As noted above, the Conservative Party had become the party of the Protestant establishment in the 1920s. With the decline of liberalism, the Labour Party

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<sup>283</sup> Richard Ned Lebow, *A Cultural Theory of International Relations*, Google Books (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2008), [https://www.google.ca/books/edition/A\\_Cultural\\_Theory\\_of\\_International\\_Relat/iqrEMF1wYrEC?hl=en&gbpv=0,342](https://www.google.ca/books/edition/A_Cultural_Theory_of_International_Relat/iqrEMF1wYrEC?hl=en&gbpv=0,342).

became a haven for working class Catholics, and party leadership became deeply concerned with winning their votes. As late as 1974, nearly 80% of Roman Catholics in Glasgow voted for the Labour Party. This provoked the ire of more conservative Catholics.<sup>284</sup> Leading British Catholic intellectuals such as Hilaire Belloc and GK Chesterton were reactionary anti-modern and anti-liberal, looking with deep nostalgia to the Middle Ages when Western Europe was united religiously by Roman Catholicism.<sup>285</sup> In this regard, the attacks on Protestantism as a form of proto-socialism appears to be an attempt of guilt by association to dissuade Catholics from voting for the Labour Party, By implication, it may also be an attempt to remind Catholics of the anti-clericalism and atheism many socialists held, such as the state atheism of the USSR.

Hay himself became a philosemite, advocating Zionism and becoming an outspoken critic of anti-Semitism after World War II. He also appeared to have distanced himself from Belloc and Chesterton by publishing critiques of their anti-Semitism in *Europe and the Jews*.<sup>286</sup> Yet it must be also noted that published no known public materials in defence of the Jews before the war. His correspondence with Belloc also contain no criticisms of the latter's anti-Semitism, or any reference to Jews; it does not appear that the latter's anti-Semitism was a barrier to their friendship. Hay also did not note the anti-Semitism in Columbanus' quote

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<sup>284</sup> Matthew Worley, *The Foundations of the British Labour Party: Identities, Cultures and Perspectives, 1900-39*, Taylor and Francis Group (London, UK: Routledge, 2016), <https://doi-org.myaccess.library.utoronto.ca/10.4324/9781315239583>, 140-1.

<sup>285</sup> Todd M. Endelman, *The Jews of Britain, 1656 to 2000* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2002), 155.

<sup>286</sup> Malcolm Vivian Hay, *Europe and the Jews: The Pressure of Christendom on the People of Israel for 1,900 Years*, 2nd ed. (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1961), 227; 255-6.

“no Jew... was ever amongst us.”<sup>287</sup> Nevertheless, in other respects, he was much like Belloc and Chesterton in their anti-modernism and medievalism, especially if Alice Ivy Hay’s claims about Malcolm’s admiration for the mediaeval Catholic Church can be taken at face value.<sup>288</sup> Even if they cannot, Malcolm did write for the distributist newspaper of Chesterton, indicating his allegiances with right-wing political Catholicism.<sup>289</sup>

Without Hay’s writings in pre-World War I newspapers and journals it is difficult to determine whether he had always supported the Catholic right, or whether this was the result of a disillusionment with classical liberalism after the war. However, his pre-war support for the interests of the Catholic Church in Quebec, which influenced the Quebecois government to pass many socially conservative policies, makes the former more likely. It is here that the fact that the Liberal Party consisted coalition of non-Anglican voters must be emphasised, and that Hay’s support for the party came from the fact that it allowed Catholics like himself to have a political voice as opposed to being an ideological liberal along the lines of William Gladstone.

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<sup>287</sup> Hay, *Chain of Error*, 111.

<sup>288</sup> Hay, *Valiant for Truth*, 177-8.

<sup>289</sup> Bruce Williamson, *Catholic Intellectual Life*, 180.

## Tracing Malcolm Hay's Influence

German philosopher Arnold Schopenhauer once wrote, “All truth passes through three stages. First, it is ridiculed. Second, it is violently opposed. Third, it is accepted as being self-evident.” In line with this quotation, acceptance of Malcolm Hay's position on the status of Celtic Christianity and its relationship to the wider Roman Catholic Church was limited outside of Catholic circles. Today, much of his research has been superseded by more complex understandings of the early Christian world, such that it cannot be said that the Papal Supremacy Thesis that he and other Catholic writers advocated for is the mainstream academic position in 2024. The most apparent impact of *A Chain of Error in Scottish History*'s publication was its use by Catholic writers such as Compton Mackenzie in constructing Catholic histories of Scotland. In this respect, Hay began a tradition of Catholic historiographies of Scotland and Celtic Christianity, allowing subsequent historians to follow his example.

A search through various church histories in Scotland indicates that Malcolm Vivian Hay had very little influence on Protestant (or at least writers who were not writing from an explicit pro-Catholic perspective) historians in the immediate years after the publication of *A Chain of Error in Scottish History*. Only after the Second World War did the notion of a Celtic Christianity that was a *de facto* autonomous regional branch of the wider Roman Catholic Church take hold in these circles.

One of the first books to mention Hay was *The Columban Church*, written in 1932 by Dr John Alexander Duke, a member of the Free Church of Scotland.<sup>290</sup> Duke repeated

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<sup>290</sup> “University of Glasgow: International Story: John Alexander Duke,” University of Glasgow, accessed October 11, 2023, <https://www.internationalstory.gla.ac.uk/person/?id=WH10725&type=P>.

standard proto-Protestant claims that the Columban Church was independent from Rome. He only responded to Hay's criticisms once in a footnote, which stated that Hay did not consider arguments put forward by Bright without seriously engaging in any of Hay's claims. He emphasised that in the Early Middle Ages, the Pope was recognised as an occupier of the prestigious position of Bishop of Rome; he was not considered the head of the Catholic Church or a leader whose word had to be obeyed, a line of thought Hay had criticised in *A Chain of Error*. Furthermore, he presented the Synod of Whitby as a conflict between two denominations, resulting in "open hostility on the part of the Church of Rome and defiance on the part of the Columban Church". Hay's arguments that the Easter Controversy was not merely an attempt to impose on Gaeldom the continental method of calculating Easter, but determining which form of Easter the entirety of the western Christian world would use were not addressed, nor Hay's claim that Columba appealed to Pope Gregory not simply to assert his independence, but to impose the British manner on the Gauls. Finally, Duke repeated claims that the Presbyterian Church had descended from Columba.<sup>291</sup>

The *Celtic Church in Scotland* was published in 1935 by William Douglas Simpson, who, as noted above, was an early critic of Hay. The book focuses primarily on the Christianisation of Scotland, and as such, topics such as the Easter Controversy and the Synod of Whitby fall beyond the scope of the work and are discussed little save for at the end. Nevertheless, in line with his previous writings, he appears to take the concept of an independent Celtic Church as an axiom when writing about Celtic-Continental relations. The primary subject of the final chapter was contrasting the differences between the "Celtic Church" and the Roman Catholic Church, which "had on their side the huge advantages of

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<sup>291</sup> John A. Duke, *The Columban Church* (London, UK: Oxford University Press, 1932), 134-8.

material resources, disciplined organisation and cohesive effort, membership of a world order, and above all the mighty tradition of *invicta Roman aeterna*".<sup>292</sup>

After World War II, more Protestant writers in Scotland became sympathetic to the Papal Supremacy Thesis. One of the foremost historians of this period, John Henderson Seaforth Burleigh, was a Presbyterian minister who became Moderator of the Church of Scotland National Assembly in 1960. That year he published *A Church History of Scotland*, which covered Scottish ecclesiastical history from Late Antiquity to the 20th century. The book was written for a general audience, but it is highly comprehensive in its scope.<sup>293</sup> Early on in the book, Burleigh wrote plainly, "The Church of the Scots [i.e. Gaels] was to be identical with the Church of the Romans in creed, in liturgy, in life, and organisation. Even its ecclesiastical language was Latin."<sup>294</sup> Nevertheless, Burleigh also noted the differences between the Celtic Christians and their continental counterparts, such as their monastic character and, most famously, the more conservative method of calculating Easter that would become so controversial in the 7th century. Of note is that unlike previous authors who always wrote "Celtic Church" capitalised, Burleigh used the phrase "the 'Celtic' churches" in the plural and with the word "Celtic" in scare quotes, indicating that in contrast to previous writers, he intended the phrase to be taken as a term for local variants of the broader Christian church, and not as a separate denomination.<sup>295</sup> Later in the chapters relating to Celtic Christianity, he noted that before the Easter Controversy, "Rome had remained honoured but

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<sup>292</sup> William Douglas Simpson, *The Celtic Church in Scotland: A Study of Its Penetration Lines and Relationships* (Aberdeen, UK: Aberdeen University Press, 1935), 106.

<sup>293</sup> John Henderson Burleigh, *A Church History of Scotland* (London, UK: Oxford University Press, 1961), vii.

<sup>294</sup> Burleigh, *Church History*, 10.

<sup>295</sup> Burleigh, *Church History*, 10-11.

remote and almost legendary to the Scots of Iona”.<sup>296</sup> Finally, in his treatment of the Synod of Whitby, Burleigh emphasised King Oswiu of Northumbria's final ruling: “Christ had given the Keys to the Kingdom of Heaven to Peter”, not Columba.<sup>297</sup>

Published around the same time was *The Life of the Celtic Church* (1963), written by James Bulloch and based on a series of lectures given at Iona Abbey in 1961. Like Burleigh's book, this work was written for a general audience.<sup>298</sup> Bulloch's work is more in line with pre-Hay books and argued for an independent Celtic Church. Still, at the same time, he does acknowledge that Celtic Christians at least formally acknowledged the supremacy of the Pope. However, he did claim that “the Celts were far from accepting the claims of Rome to supremacy when this conflicted with their position”, citing, like others before him, the refusal of the British bishops to recognise the authority of the Papal-appointed Augustine as Archbishop of Canterbury.<sup>299</sup> Bulloch also cited Living Dog as proof that Columbanus was willing to ignore Papal claims as the ultimate authority of the Catholic Church; a position that was already criticised by Hay over 35 years before and described the Synod of Whitby “the surrender... of their relative independence”, while ignoring over the wording of the Oswiu's final judgement.<sup>300</sup>

The most fruitful result of Hay's advocacy and research was as a basis for the writing of Catholic-centred histories of Scotland and Celtic Christianity. One of the first works to cite Hay positively was *Christianity in Celtic Lands*, published by Dom Louis Gougaud. Born in

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<sup>296</sup> Burleigh, *Church History*, 25.

<sup>297</sup> Burleigh, *Church History*, 25-6.

<sup>298</sup> Ian Muirhead, “The Life of the Celtic Church by James Bulloch,” *Scottish Journal of Theology* 17, no. 1 (1964): 112–14, <https://doi.org/10.1017/s0036930600006232>, 112.

<sup>299</sup> James E Bulloch, *The Life of the Celtic Church* (Edinburgh, UK: Saint Andrew Press, 1963), 195.

<sup>300</sup> Bulloch, *Celtic Church*, 196.



Britanny in 1877, he remained “quite faithfully attached” to his home region even as he joined Saint Michael’s Abbey in Farnborough, Hampshire. Although, as previously noted, the first edition of *Christianity in Celtic Lands* was published in 1911, his English-language edition published in 1932 could draw on scholarship not available two decades earlier, Malcolm Hay and *A Chain of Error* among them. Hay is cited only twice, but one of those citations is in a pivotal part of the book on how the Celtic Christians regarded themselves as part of a universal Catholic Church regardless of the diverging nature of their practices. On page 214, he cited Hay, among other writers such as McNaught, regarding Columbanus’ letter to Pope Boniface, concluding like Hay that he was merely “inviting the Pope to defend himself from charge or suspicions of heresy”.<sup>301</sup> Later, on page 329, he also cited Hay when referring to the unknown nature of the “barbarous rite” celebrated in Scotland at the time of Queen Margaret that was suppressed in favour of standard Roman liturgy.<sup>302</sup> In the section in question, Hay discussed the abuse of this quote from an 11<sup>th</sup>-century document and how Protestant historians misinterpreted it to assume that the Eucharist was being celebrated in Gaelic (like in modern Protestant groups) without evidence.<sup>303</sup> Gougnoud’s work was enormously influential, with a modern church historian, Keith Robbins, describing it as “a classic scholarly study with a resonance beyond the academic world”.<sup>304</sup> The incorporation of Hay’s research into this book is likely his most significant influence outside Scotland.

The first Catholic historian of Scotland to cite *A Chain of Error* was Compton Mackenzie in his 1936 work *Catholicism and Scotland*. Unlike Hay, Mackenzie was a

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<sup>301</sup> Louis Gougnoud and Maud Joynt, *Christianity in Celtic Lands* (London, UK: Sheed & Ward, 1932), 214.

<sup>302</sup> Gougnoud and Joynt, *Christianity in Celtic Lands*, 329.

<sup>303</sup> Hay, *Chain of Error*, 231-4.

<sup>304</sup> Keith Robbins, *England, Ireland, Scotland, Wales: The Christian Church 1900-2000* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2010), 198.

convert to Roman Catholicism, joining the Church in 1914, slightly before his service in World War One, where he served with great distinction in the Balkans and was decorated by multiple nations. After the war, he settled on the majority Catholic Isle of Barra, where he wrote many plays and comic novels, such as *Whisky Galore* and *Monarch of the Glen*, for which he is best known. However, Mackenzie was also a fervent Scottish Nationalist, joining the Scottish National Party. As a nationalist, he continually emphasised Roman Catholicism's role in forming the Scottish nation using tactics like the Protestant writers discussed above.<sup>305</sup> *Catholicism and Scotland* discusses the topics mentioned above from Late Antiquity to its publication in 1936. In particular, the first chapter depends heavily on *A Chain of Error* in Scottish History in debunking Protestant mythmaking. Here, he cited St Columbanus' letter to Boniface IV: "For all we Irish... are the disciples of SS. Peter and Paul... the Catholic Faith as it was first delivered from you, the successors, that is, of the holy apostles, is retained among us unchanged" as evidence of the unity of the "Celtic" and Roman Catholic Churches, condemning as Hay did its misquotation by Skene and others.<sup>306</sup> He also condemned claims by Protestants such as Duke that Papal supremacy carried a different meaning in the 7th century than it did in the 20th, writing that "If our Blessed Lord spoke these words,<sup>307</sup> Papal supremacy means now what it meant at any date since they were uttered and what it will mean at any date until the consummation of the world".<sup>308</sup> Although this is beyond the scope of this study, subsequent sections of the book also quote extensively from Malcolm Hay's

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<sup>305</sup> Williamson, *Catholic Intellectual Life*, 189-91.

<sup>306</sup> Mackenzie, *Catholicism and Scotland*, 6.

<sup>307</sup> "And I say to thee: That thou art Peter; and upon this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." (Matthew 16:18 [Douay-Rheims])

<sup>308</sup> Mackenzie, *Catholicism and Scotland*, 6.

later book, *The Blairs Papers*, particularly those documents that deal with the Catholic Reformation in Scotland and Jesuit activities.

## Conclusion: The *Chain of Error* and the History Wars of the 21st Century

It is a truism that historical figures must be judged by the standards of their own time, and Malcolm Vivian Hay is no exception. When assessing his works and legacy, it is important to understand his social and religious background as a Roman Catholic landowner writing in the 1920s. Although as a writer he did do much to advocate for the rights of Catholics across the British Empire, his anti-socialism and distributist political views mark him as somebody critiquing the liberal capitalist hegemony from the right; as somebody who viewed the Middle Ages as the exemplar of Western civilisation and the Reformation as the beginning of a great decline. Nevertheless, as a member of a minority group, Hay and the reception to his works are of relevance to the practice and malpractice of history today.

There are many parallels between the controversy surrounding the publication of *The Chain of Error* and the modern-day history wars. Indeed, the controversy may be considered an exemplary history war, showing how they evolve, the social context behind them, and how they conclude, if they do so at all. This process goes beyond mere revision of historical narratives and competing schools of historiography in academia, such as Marxists vs the Annales School vs those of the Cultural and Linguistic Turns, etc. These history wars are a flashpoint for how the public engages with the past, and how history, like all facets of culture, is influenced by the dominant mores and values of society, with attempts to change these narratives by minorities becoming part in the broader struggle for civil rights and equality. The controversy also raises questions about the relationship between historians and history, and between history and power.

History wars do not arise in a vacuum. They often result from significant social turbulences that lead people to question their society's past, or to find refuge in an idealized version of that society's past. In the 1920s, as demonstrated at the beginning of this article, Western society was recovering from the devastating First World War, which claimed the lives of millions of people and laid waste to much of the world, not only Western Europe. Radical political movements on both sides of the political spectrum, with communists and fascists being the largest, sought to overturn existing society and build a new world through revolution. Both left and right sought to legitimatise their movement through the study of history: Marxist historians saw history as a series of increasingly violent class conflicts which would culminate in overthrowing capitalism and establishing socialism worldwide. In contrast, right-wing historians, such as those employed by the Nazi Party, emphasised the "purity" of a nation-state now threatened by foreigners and modernity. In Scotland, right-wing leaders like John White and others employed the rhetoric of Scotland as a "pure" Protestant nation, one that had resisted the Roman Catholic Church from its earliest days with the help of leaders such as St Columba and Columbanus, which foreign Catholic immigrants from Ireland were now threatening. In this context, Malcolm Vivian Hay wrote *A Chain of Error in Scottish History* to rebuke the many generations of sectarian anti-Catholic historians who wrote biased accounts of British church history.

Similarly, the history wars of the later 20th century and those of the 21<sup>st</sup> were also associated with social disruption and counterculture eras. The history wars of the last 20th century had their origins in the counterculture of the 1960s, when left-wing politics became popular in the United States, and the Civil Rights Movement, headed by charismatic individuals like Martin Luther King Jr and Malcolm X, engaged in activism to end segregation and better the conditions of African Americans. In line with the social

movements of the decade, a new generation of historians began to question dominant narratives of American history, which favoured white people and began incorporating multinational perspectives into their research.<sup>309</sup>

Other history wars began in the 1980s and 1990s, after the Cold War. Previous decades were dominated by the struggle between capitalism and communism, which ended dramatically with the collapse of the Soviet Union and other Marxist-Leninist regimes in Eastern Europe. During this period, new technologies and trade networks emerged worldwide, creating a demand for new educational systems and approaches to the past to be taught in schools.

In the former Warsaw Pact, new textbooks appeared which approached the period of Marxism-Leninism with a highly critical eye, earning the ire of remaining communists such as head of the CPRF Gennady Zugyanov, who believed new textbooks to be insufficiently patriotic and overly essential of prominent Soviet leaders like Josef Stalin. In the west, too, there were controversies. As the United Kingdom attempted to develop a national curriculum in the 1980s, reformers argued that history classes should teach students to engage with the past and think for themselves critically. In contrast, conservative critics (Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher among them) argued that this approach deviated from teaching children British patriotism.<sup>310</sup> A heated controversy arose in Australia over the bicentennial of formal British colonisation in 1988. Aboriginal activists fought with white traditionalists over what the former described as “200 years of lies”, with the latter accusing the left of being unpatriotic.<sup>311</sup>

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<sup>309</sup> Nash, Crabtree and Dunn, *History on Trial*, 75-7.

<sup>310</sup> Nash, Crabtree and Dunn, *History on Trial*, 129-139.

<sup>311</sup> Stuart Macintyre and Anna Clark, *The History Wars* (Carlton, Vic: Melbourne University Press, 2004), 112.

These periods of social upheaval allow for members of marginalised groups to criticise the official view of the past. In the 1920s and 1930s, it was Malcolm Hay and Compton Mackenzie whose work challenged the status quo in Scottish historiography. Indeed, for Hay, it was the postwar upheavals which resulted in the collapse of the Liberal Party which enabled to enable him to write his attack on Protestant historiography without angering his fellow Liberals. Similarly, starting from the 1960s, numerous civil rights groups, most notably the African-American Civil Rights Movement, but also activists such as Red Power and their Australian Aboriginal counterparts, were able to question white coloniser-centric narratives as part of a broader searching quest for equal representation and participation in civil society and social justice. Although Hay was writing from the perspective of a conservative Roman Catholic, and his influence was far less than the previously noted movement, the fact that Hay's career and these social movements both arose in periods of social upheaval is noteworthy.

What the shared history wars also have in common is their very contested nature. After the publication of *A Chain of Error in Scottish History*, primarily Protestant reviewers dismissed the book as sectarian and its claims as invalid, an accusation shared by conservatives who attacked new generations of historians for being overly partisan and biased. A common thread through these conservative attacks on dissenting historians is their claim to be the ones who are the objective fact-holders. In contrast, their opponents are hysterical, irrational, or unpatriotic. Indeed, in the 21st century, commentators have described this blanket dismissal of claims on the grounds of the language used as “tone policing” and

have noted its use to criticisms of prejudices such as racism.<sup>312</sup> To a certain extent, there is also an element of projection here: both the anonymous reviewers for the *Scottish Historical Review* and the *Times Literary Supplement* condemned Hay for a supposedly angry tone in his work and sectarianism when it was they who used the most belligerent language and had acted in the name of sectarian interests. The same can be said of the conservative critics of new, more critical schools of history, such as US Republicans Rush Limbaugh and Bob Dole, who claimed they were protecting history from partisan politics when they were active in the name of a narrow, political point of view.<sup>313</sup>

However, if there is another constant in the history of history wars, it is the fact that these minority activists are successful in shifting the narrative in their favour. It took several decades for Malcolm Hay's arguments in *A Chain of Error* to be accepted by mainstream Protestant historians. Even then, it must be noted that historians of all denominations today agree that there are some ideas of Hay's which are dated by the standards of our current understanding of the past, such as the concept that it was that the Pope was the supreme authority of the early Christian world. Even then, it was the way historians build on works, first by being incorporated into subsequent histories like Gougnouds and then by later generations of historians incorporating these works into their own, and so forth, that allowed his views to gain acceptance; not necessarily the direct influence of Hay himself. Today's generations of historians do not have to wait as long on theses such as the American Civil War being waged over slavery and not states' rights or the role of early politicians such as

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<sup>312</sup> Freeman, Lauren., Stewart, Heather. *Microaggressions in Medicine*. (United States: Oxford University Press, Incorporated, 2024), 71-2.

[https://www.google.ca/books/edition/Microaggressions\\_in\\_Medicine/kvntEAAAQBAJ?hl=en&gbpv=0](https://www.google.ca/books/edition/Microaggressions_in_Medicine/kvntEAAAQBAJ?hl=en&gbpv=0)

<sup>313</sup> Stuart Macintyre and Anna Clark, *The History Wars* (Carlton, Vic: Melbourne University Press, 2004), 6-7.



John A MacDonald's or Alexander Mackenzie's role in (non-respectively) establishing and expanding the residential school system.

A subsequent takeaway from a comparison between the history wars of the 1920s and those being waged around the world today is that historians are not immune to bias. From the Reformation to the early 20th century, entire generations of Protestant historians consciously or unconsciously perpetuated numerous sectarian, anti-Catholic causes in their work. By ignorance, wilful or otherwise, conscious and unconscious biases and a simple refusal to check the facts if they were consistent in their worldview, they perpetuated entire "chains of error" not only in Scottish historiography but also in other nations. A historian in the 21st century must research sources faithfully and examine the biases and faults in both these sources and themselves to be genuinely influential scholars and not perpetuate another chain of error in history.

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