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Abstract

This paper will primarily call into question the components of the 'commanding' vernacular religious culture in Reformation England between the years 1540 and 1559 and relate them to the strengthening of English 'national consciousness'. The analysis will take into consideration early Anglican sermons as examples of this vernacular religious culture. The preachers whose sermons will be put into question in this analysis are Hugh Latimer and Thomas Lever whose motives to preach in the way they did will also be elucidated by other important documents. As for the starting assumptions of the concepts of 'nation,' 'nationalism,' and 'national sentiment or consciousness,' Anthony Smith, the influential theorist of nationalism studies, will be our beacon, especially having considered his emphasis on the pre-existing cultures which supposedly contributed to the formation of modern nationalism(s). Keeping in mind the directions of Smith, we will also be taking a look at the common myths or other ties which unified the English nation and bolstered up the emergence of English national consciousness. Throughout the analyses, the particular focus will be put on the role and efficiency of the state apparatus which used this vernacular religious culture as a tool of disseminating a discourse aimed at constituting national unity and consciousness.

The commonplace idea about the interplay between the English Reformation and national consciousness usually asserts that the breach with the Papal See resulted in a direct contribution to the formation of English national sentiment. However, it is certain that this issue is more complicated than was echoed in this statement. Historians today have a tendency to acknowledge the unifying and factious legacy of the English Reformation. This analysis will focus upon the unifying themes we observe in the vernacular of the time. By analyzing the examples of the vernacular, this paper will situate the emergence of English national consciousness as a result of the rising central control of London.

Before perusing the English vernacular culture, however, it will be helpful to clarify the terminology. In this effort, Anthony Smith, a theorist of nationalism, will be our beacon. Smith differs from other contemporary scholars in that his approach to nationalism and ethnicity situates itself as a critique of modernity.[1] Smith in his *The Ethnic Origins of Nations* stated that historians should place any analysis of modern nationalism in a wide historical context through which common themes, ethnic ties, and sentiments will be apparent.[2] Smith's focus is on the pre-existing structures which then shaped modern nationalisms. For Smith, national sentiment is characterized by a strong sense of "loyalty to the 'nation', aspiring to its unity, purity, autonomy and strength."[3] It differs from nationalism which embodies doctrine and action; that is, nationalism is an ideological movement.[4] Consequently, the attempt in this analysis is not to find a strand of nationalism in the late sixteenth century in England, but rather to specify the processes and contexts which led to the formation of English national consciousness. Smith's emphasis on the group centrality and uniqueness in early ethnic groups become quite functional for such an effort. Smith argues:

> This widespread sense of group centrality and uniqueness embodied a twin assumption. On the one hand, the myths of origins, the historical memories, cultures and homelands of a given *ethnie* were felt to be 'natural' and 'proper'; they possessed 'value' and 'holiness', therefore 'our heritage' was in some sense genuine. On the other hand, the myths, memories, cultures and

homelands of others somehow lacked value and truth, and were therefore temporary and defective. The light of divine truth might shine forever on 'our' land and community; but other *ethnie* 'walked in darkness' and spoke 'barbarian' tongues.[5]

With such a perspective, a better critical analysis on the interplay between Protestantism and national consciousness in the sixteenth century England should emphasize both internal and external contexts. In this paper, internal contexts will include the attempts to identify the association of Protestantism with the royal supremacy between the years 1540 and 1559, while external contexts will take account of the existence of an anti-Papal discourse.

The developing vernacular culture, which was at least a century old by the time of the Reformation, has an absolute contribution to the formation of English national consciousness. It would be simplistic to consider the vernacular religious culture as a sole cause, though. The political will from the center, London, interacted with the vernacular culture in the shaping English national sentiment. The first signs of this political support became evident in 1539 with the first authorized translation of the Bible in English.

The title page of the Great Bible reveals much to a discerning eye about the new political will in London (see Figure 1). Apparently, the dominant figure at the top centre of the engraving is Henry VIII, handing over the 'Verbum Dei' to his clergy. At the middle section, furthermore, one can see the members of the Church spreading the holy word of God among the public. As for the bottom of the engraving, it is covered by the numerous representative figures from the public who joyfully cry 'Vivat Rex' or 'God Save the Kynge.' What was implied through the symbolic language of this engraving is the idea of royal supremacy which controls everything from the top center of the society. Indeed, it is the royal will that added the new element to an already existing vernacular culture. The Latin words dispersed on this engraving such as the cheerful expressions of consent by the public or the phrase 'Verbum Dei' i.e. God's Word on the Scriptures suggest that the impetus of the formation of English national consciousness is the royal supremacy itself; the vernacular religious culture, thus, appears only as the carrier of this political will.

Therefore, it had a considerable amount of influence on the public since it carried God's message together with those of the kings and queens. The sermons that will be examined will clearly show this political characteristic of the vernacular religious culture.

In 1538, Thomas Cromwell issued his injunctions to the clergy. In the fifth item, Cromwell ordered that "ye shall make… one sermon every quarter of the year at least."[6] One of the purposes of these sermons for Cromwell was to teach the ordinary people the Gospel of Christ. One may trace Cromwell's order through the other injunctions issued by Edward VI and Elizabeth I, too.[7] However, there is an apparent difference of emphasis in the first item of Elizabethan Injunctions issued in 1559: "all ecclesiastical persons… shall… declare, manifest and open, four times every year at least, in their sermons and other collations, that *all usurped and foreign power, having no establishment nor ground by the law of God*, was of most just causes taken away and abolished [emphasis added]."[8] In the Preliminaries of the *Book of Homilies*, the reason for such a change was clarified: "Furthermore, her Highnesse commandeth, that notwithstanding this order, the sayd Ecclesiasticall persons shall read her Maiesties Iniunctions, as such times, and in such order, as is in the booke thereof appointed."[9] Therefore, the *Book of Homilies* signals how vernacular religious culture was to be used to convey the message of the Queen to justify both the royal supremacy and the destruction of foreign religious influence. Besides, this change of emphasis is remarkable in that it shows the increasing degree of indoctrination appearing in religious preaching.

Mary Morrissey, who underlined the importance of sermons to the research of early modern period, argued that sermons which are preached in accordance with the political and social context were one of the most reliable sources for understanding early modern ideology.[10] She claimed that "such studies of early modern ideology based around the evolution and manipulation of *commonplaces* will add greatly to our understanding of the mechanisms by which preaching shaped political opinion."[11]

Hugh Latimer, the most notable preacher of the Tudor age, preached his sermon known as "Convocation Sermon" to the clergy

before the Parliament assembled in 1536. The first part of his sermon which can be regarded as an adaptation of a Biblical parable to contemporary England primarily underlined the significance and godliness of 'true' preaching. "I commanded you that with all industry and labor ye should feed My sheep," Latimer addressed to the clergy in God's voice, threatening with God's pending punishment, "I commanded you to teach My commandments and not your fancies… Christian people should hear My doctrine, and at their commodity[12] read it also, as many as would. Your care is not that all men may hear it, but all your care is that no layman do read it."[13] Latimer ends the first part of his sermon with prayers: "wherein ye shall pray for our most gracious sovereign lord the King, chief and supreme head of the church of England under Christ, and for the most excellent, gracious, and virtuous lady Queen Jane, his most lawful wife."[14] Latimer's sermon, thus, indicates how royal supremacy would be echoed in the sermons of clergy who were indirectly admonished to preach in the way approved by London.

Latimer's "Sermon on the Plowers" delivered in 1548 also provides a good example how the Papacy was considered at those times. Describing the most effective preacher in England, namely the Devil, Latimer said "his office is to hinder religion, to maintain superstition, to set up idolatry, to teach all kind of popery."[15] He further relied on this analogy by claiming that "the devil, by the help of that Italian bishop yonder, his chaplain, hath labored by all means that he might to frustrate the death of Christ and the merits of His Passion."[16] Latimer built upon the same analogy in his "First Sermon before Edward VI." Expressing his doubts about the probable marriages of Queen Mary and Elizabeth who were in the succession line, Latimer said that "let us seek no stranger of another nation, no hypocrite which shall bring in again all papistry, hypocrisy, idolatry, no diabolical ministers which shall maintain all devilish works and evil exercises."[17] Therefore, the image of the Papacy preached to the educated public of London, and later to the King's Majesty was not a favorable one, juxtaposing the Papacy with the devil and his works.

Thomas Lever, who is considered as a representative of the second generation of preachers of the English Reformation, delivered

a sermon in 1550 at St. Paul's Church, where, from the beginning
till the end of the first part of his sermon, he threatened the public,
saying that England shall be destroyed since "thou wretched Eng-
lande beleuſt not gods worde, regardeſt not gods vengeaunce."[18]
What Lever intended to convey by this threat to the public is that
"euerye kyngdome that is deuyded in it ſelfe, ſhall be deſolate, and
deſtroyed."[19] This idea of division to which he referred was the one
caused by different opinions in religion, rebellious sedition, courte-
ous ambition, and self-centeredness.[20] However, England was not all
alone in the face of this threat: it shall be destroyed together with "all
thyne ennemyes, bothe Scots, Frenchmen, Papiſtes, and Turkes."[21]
Therefore, he asked them to repent all their sins so that "this
pleaſaunte place of Englande, and good people ſhall be preſerued and
ſaued by thy mercy of God."[22] While Lever distanced his beloved
England from Scotland, France, the Papacy, and the Ottomans, he
also regarded any sort of disagreement on religious issues or an act of
disobedience i.e. rebellion against the center as a sign of siding with
these enemies. It was not only the obedience to God he urged people
to manage but also to the King. However, the attempts of taming the
public through the power of preaching and religious discourse appar-
ently did not prevent some members of society from dissenting. The
emergence of nonconformists who despised and broke the orders set
forth by the *Book of Common Prayer* became one of the themes of the
Queen's Proclamation against Nonconformists, in 1573: "the cause
of which disorders her Majesty doth plainly understand to be the
negligence of the bishops and other magistrates, who should cause
the good laws and acts of parliament made in this behalf to be better
executed."[23] In other words, the emergence of non-conformists in
England was the fault of the clergymen who did not perform their
duties fully. They were given the responsibility to preach sermons
with unifying themes and motifs but they failed to tackle the prob-
lem of the nonconformists. This shows how the tool of vernacular
religious culture was intended to function as a discursive practice on
the minds of ordinary people, and sometimes how it failed.

   The period from 1540s onwards witnessed a great number of at-
tempts to unify the realm of England through the discourse of reli-

gious unity. In this respect, Thomas Lever is another good example of one of the popular preachers of the period for the purpose of social engineering. His religious preaching can be considered as a tool of social control as well. Regarding the evil rulers and gentlemen, Lever asserted that the authority which always derives its source from that of God is innately good but the rule of evil people over a country is a punishment of God for the sins of people: "it is not therefore repynyng, rebellyng, or refiftyng gods ordinance, that wyll amende euyll rulers… so that who foeuer refifteth the offycers, be the menne neuer fo euyll that be in office, he refifteth the ordinaunce of God."[24] Throughout the rest of his preaching, he urged people to repent their sins and pray to God but not rebel to the authority since the law of God is always present if the law of men is not.[25]

Lever's "The Sermon before Edward VI" in 1550, reminds the king and his counselors of their duty to God and to the people of England. Lever's analogy supports the common imagery of the English kings as Christ-like figures: "you are the chiefe fhepherdes, you are the moft reuerende fathers in Chrifte, hauynge the wynges of power and authoritie, to fhadow, faue, and keepe thefe lambes of god, thefe [the] chekens… committed vnto your handes, to be faued, kepte, and proudyded for."[26] Lever, later on, clarified from which evil he advised the King to protect his people. It was the protection from the wild fox of papist superstition. A few months later in the same year, Lever sent an epistle to the Privy Council. He still followed the same route of argumentation, expressing his doubts on the 'flatterers' who claimed that the Reformation in the Isle has succeeded. For Lever, these people were flatterers "for papiftry is not baniyfhed out of Englande by pure religion, but ouerrenne, fuppreffed and kepte vnder thys realme by couetous ambicion."[27] They would need to wait till the end of Edward's reign and Queen Mary's fresh start to see that Lever's observation was true.

Lever's statements are also equally important in terms of the role of grammar schools and universities during the Reformation: "they [the flatterers] fell awaye Grammer fcoles, they decai the vniuerfities, and they vfe fuche practifes, as maketh God to be vnknowen, the Kynge dyfobeyed."[28] Apparently, the education controlled by Lon-

don was considered as an antidote to the 'wild fox' of the Papacy. In his Sermon delivered at Paul's Cross in 1550, Lever continued to maintain his stand regarding the grammar schools and universities. For Lever, schooling meant a godly upbringing of the youth: "in the cuntrey manye Grammer Scholes founded of a godly intent to brynge vp poore ſonnes in learnynge and virtue… take hede… surely the pullyng downe of gramer ſcholes, the deuyliſhe droawnynge of youthe in ignoraunce, the vtter decaye of the vniuerſities…"[29] What is meant by the 'godly upbringing' of the young generations in the grammar schools and universities is, of course, not solely learning how to read or write but also getting exposed to the religious views approved by the center. This religious view, of course, both requires adherence to the words of God and obedience to the King.

In Lever's sermons, the image of 'the servants of Mammon' directly derived from the New Testament was frequently used. In the recurring examples in the Bible, mammon is regarded as the enemy of God: "You cannot serve God and mammon."[30] Mammon personifies the riches, greed, and self-centeredness, and Lever regarded the servants of Mammon as the common enemy of both God and the king.[31] This realm of England, for Lever, cannot be happy and wealthy as long as the covetous people exist.[32] Therefore, by converting these servants of Mammon to the true faith and teaching them God's word in the way approved by London, this realm shall be most happy.[33] After Lever proclaimed this, how he described England turns out to be more striking: "[England] wher gods word is frely ſet forth in the mother toung, plainly preached in ſolempne congregacions, and commonly vſed in daily communicacion."[34] It is really interesting to see not only his association of mammon as the common enemy of God and the King's Majesty in contrast to the New Testament where mammon is described as the sole enemy of God, but also how much importance he attributed to the use of vernacular language in both religious and secular life. Lever was aware of the influence he imprinted on the public through using the language they spoke.

Most of the aforementioned sources gave voice to the political and religious views approved by the state either explicitly or implic-

itly. However, claiming that everything was as smooth as these documents reveal is rather simplistic. Many acts were passed during the Elizabethan times to reduce the effects of anti-Protestant preaching, non-conformism, and the remnants of Catholic discourse. Furthermore, though it is possible to see, in most of the sermons or state documents, the traces of the attempts of politically and religiously unifying the English community with a particular emphasis on anti-Papal stance and the association of royal supremacy with the Protestantism, it is still difficult to determine to what extent the listeners of these unifying religious discourses derived the intended message. It is true that the Church was the best network in early modern society to convey a message, and the political center, London took advantage of the efficiency of this national network to a greater extent to circulate, through godly preaching, the ideas which formed her self-imagery.

In the sermons analyzed, it is interesting to see that there is no reference to the Protestant community dominating northern Europe, which can be argued as their distinctive point from the ideas promoted by the continental reformers, such as Bale and Foxe who had suffered the Marian exile. Since there is no explicit reference, either, to the idea of elect nationhood or to the mythical origins of Englishness but many statements distancing the English community from continental Europe, the Scots, the Ottomans, and the Papacy, the vernacular religious culture from 1540s onwards formally prepared the backdrop of the image of *an* Elect Nation that would appear in the following decades in English history.

Keeping in mind the arguments of Anthony Smith, one can conclude that the common enemy of the English public of the time, as echoed in the sermons, was nearly everyone but English Protestants. Moreover, the common ties and myths in this vernacular religious culture were mostly still biblical, and the national sentiments denoted a mixture of political and religious concerns. Consequently, the vernacular religious culture during the English Reformation was a tool controlled by the state to mold certain ideas that would eventually contribute indirectly both to the national unification and English national sentiment.
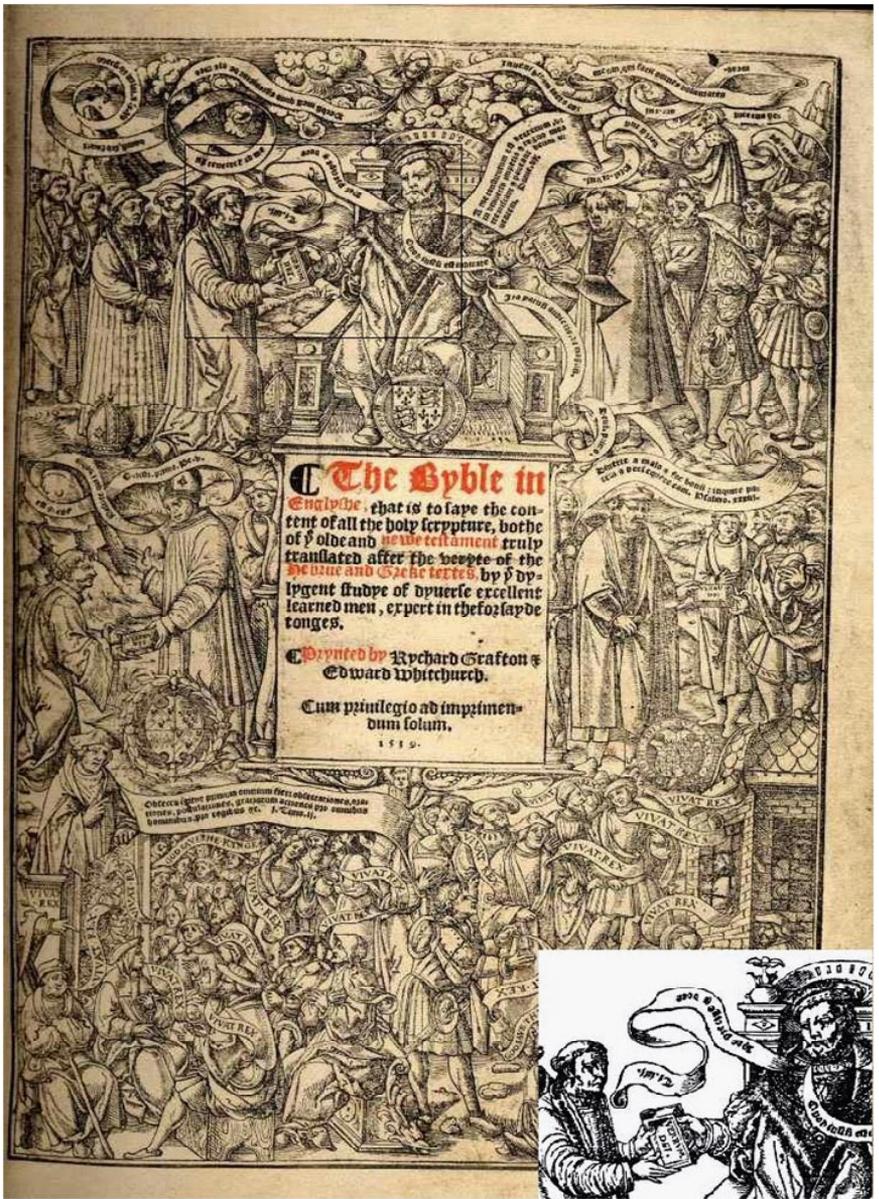
Figure 1: The title-page of the Great Bible (1539)[35]

Notes

1   Umut Ozkirimli, *Theories of Nationalism: A Critical Introduction*, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000) 174.

2   Anthony D. Smith, *The Ethnic Origins of Nations*, (New York: Basil Blackwell, 1986) 13.

3   Ibid., 174.

4   Anthony D. Smith, *Theories of Nationalism*, (New York: Harper&Row, 1971) 171.

5   Anthony Smith, *The Ethnic Origins*, 48.

6   Thomas Cromwell, "Injunctions to the Clergy made by Cromwell (1538)", *The Reformation and the Renaissance 1485-1547*, comp. Frederick William Bewsher, (London: G. Bell and Sons, 1916) 77.

7   Cf. "The Edwardian Injunctions, 1547" *Documents of The English Reformation*, ed. Gerald Bray, (Cambridge: James Clarke&Co., Ltd, 2004); "The Elizabethan Injunctions, 1559", *Documents of The English Reformation*.

8   "The Elizabethan Injunctions, 1559", *Documents of The English Reformation*, 336.

9   "Preliminaries" [The Preface as published in the year 1562], *The Elizabethan Homilies*, ed. Ian Lancashire, 11.20.2007; http://www.library.utoronto.ca/utel/ret/homilies/bk1intro.html .

10 Mary Morrissey, "Interdisciplinarity and the Study of Early Modern Sermons", *Historical Journal*, Vol. 42, No.4. (Dec., 1999), pp. 1111-1123; http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0018-246X%28199912%2942%3A4%3C1111%3AIATSOE%3E2.0.CO%3B2-V, 1112.

11 Ibid., 1117

12 *Commodity*: convenience.

13 Hugh Latimer, "Convocation Sermon", *Selected Sermons of Hugh Latimer*, ed. Allan G. Chester, (Charlottesville: The University Press of Virginia, 1968) 7.

14 Ibid., 9

15 Hugh Latimer, "Sermon on the Plowers", *Selected Sermons*, 41.

16 Ibid., 45-46

17 Hugh Latimer, "First Sermon before Edward VI", Selected Sermons, 58.

18 Thomas Lever, "The Sermon in the Shrouds of St. Paul's Church", *English Reprints*, ed. Edward Arber, (London: A. Murray, [etc.], 1870) 23.

19 Ibid., 23.

20 Ibid., 23.

21 Ibid., 23.

22 Ibid., 25.

23 "The Queen's Proclamation against Nonconformists, 1573", *Select Statues and Other Constitutional Documents Illustrative of the Reigns of Elizabeth and James I*, ed. George Walter Prothero, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1898) 208.

24 Thomas Lever, "The Sermon in the Shrouds of St. Paul's Church", *English Reprints*, 34-5.

25 Ibid., 43

26 Thomas Lever, "The Sermon Before King Edward VI", *English Reprints*, 57.

27 Thomas Lever, "The Epistle [to the Counsell]", *English Reprints*, 95.

28 Ibid., 96

29 Thomas Lever, "The Sermon at Paul's Cross", *English Reprints,* 123-4.

30 Matthew 6:24; Luke 16:13.

31 Thomas Lever, "The Sermon at Paul's Cross", *English Reprints,*134.

32 Ibid., 133

33 Contrary to modern usage, mammon appears with a capital 'M' in Lever's sermons. While quoting from Lever, I strictly reserved the capital letter.

34 Ibid., 134

35 The images retrieved from: http://www.leeds.ac.uk/library/adopt-a-book/bible.htm and http://www.princeton.edu/~rbsc/exhibitions/bible/ , 11.28.2007.