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Insular Christianity  
Alternative models of the Church  
in Britain and Ireland, c.1570–c.1700



*Edited by*  
ROBERT ARMSTRONG AND  
TADHG Ó HANNRACHÁIN

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## Chapter 12

# The laity and the structure of the Catholic Church in early modern Scotland

*R. Scott Spurlock*

Structurally the Catholic Church in Scotland had been more or less undone by the 1570s, although during the 1580s and into the 1590s the possibility of a violent Catholic Counter-Reformation seemed plausible to some clerics.<sup>1</sup> While leading nobility and gentry, including Maxwell, Huntly and Errol, were implicated (most frequently by political rivals) in Jesuit encouraged plots to overthrow the Scottish government with Spanish help, as the probability of James VI becoming James I grew ever more likely and the personal interests of individual magnates came to overshadow a united Catholic endeavour, the likelihood of armed Catholic resistance diminished.<sup>2</sup> The victory of Catholic forces, including Camerons, Clan Ranald of Lochaber and some MacPhersons, at the Battle of Glenlivet did more to confirm the power of regional magnates among their supporters than it did to signal a future of militant Catholic action. Catholicism in Lowland Scotland by 1603 had become a religious minority persisting under the protection of regional magnates, while the Society of Jesus had been reduced from advocates of political insurgency to providing a skeletal clerical base maintaining Catholicism within the bounds of their protectors' influence. Even money sent by the Spanish to Huntly for the support of a Counter-Reformation movement was used not for mission, but to bolster his domestic position, just as money from the Pope had been in 1594.<sup>3</sup>

While the Jesuits represented the only externally organized effort seeking to further Catholicism in Lowland Scotland during the first decades of the seventeenth century, they actually depended more on local patrons than on their continental superiors. Rome paid little attention to the propagation of Scots Catholicism, despite calls for assistance, and even though the foundation of *Propaganda Fide* in 1622 led to a commitment for Scotland in the following year, no real provision materialized until the appointment of an apostolic prefect in 1653. As a result, the 'political Catholicism' noted by Michael Yellow-

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lees and Ruth Grant had, by the union of the crowns, become a position not for securing international support for a political coup, but one for ensuring the entrenchment of local power.<sup>4</sup> The sort of political intrigue proposing the removal of the king advocated by the eighth Lord Maxwell in the 1580s had become anachronistic.

Catholicism in Scottish Gaeldom was in an even more deplorable state structurally from the outset of the Reformation.<sup>5</sup> The problem both pre- and post-Reformation was maintaining a qualified clergy to work in remote and overly-large parishes. Language served as an additional barrier although the Kirk, through John Carswell, had made laudable efforts to provide a Gaelic liturgy for the new Protestant clergy.<sup>6</sup> The result was that, although a skeletal Protestant infrastructure was in place by 1600, the Catholic faith survived in forms unaffected by the Council of Trent; albeit with little impetus for proselytizing and with very little external contact. Whereas Ireland had three vicars apostolic by 1600, Scotland had none.<sup>7</sup> The majority of the Catholic clergy had, like Patrick MacLean, the last Roman Catholic Bishop of the Isles, given up their ministries in return for state pensions. Some ministry probably continued in particular localities, although the first Counter-Reformation Franciscan missionaries' reports tend to indicate a confessional vacuum in much of the Hebrides where 'conversions' were recorded in their thousands and references to Protestant ministers were conspicuous by their absence.<sup>8</sup> The Western Isles were evidently poorly ministered to by both Catholics and Protestants. Yet this was not through lack of intent on the part of the Kirk. They made several attempts to introduce a Protestant ministry to Gaelic-speaking regions, most successfully within those areas under the influence of Clan Campbell. By contrast, despite some calls for assistance from within Scotland, Rome showed very little interest in the situation in Scotland until the 1650s. Moreover, Scotland remained bishop-less from the death of the exiled archbishop James Beaton in Paris in 1603 until the appointment of Thomas Nicolson in 1694.

Thus, in both the Lowlands and the Highlands and Islands, the survival of Catholicism in Scotland rested not on an ecclesiastical structure funded by Rome, but on the belligerent resistance of lay Catholics to conformity. Despite the international political aspects of Catholicism identified in recent scholarship, the Scottish state persisted in seeing Catholicism primarily as an aberration or persistent, lingering heresy rather than an external risk to political security. In England and Ireland this was not the case as fears over Spanish aims, demonstrated in the Armada and intervention in the Nine Years War, ensured that the government of England viewed Catholicism as possessing explicit political attributes. In fact, the English were more wary of the political implications of Catholic risings in Scotland than were the Scots; a reality that James VI was happy to use to his advantage in securing favourable terms

with England.<sup>9</sup> Owing to the lack of nagging political fears, Allan Macinnes argues that Roman Catholics never represented, nor were perceived to represent, any 'sustained or serious threat to the civil or religious establishment in Scotland during the seventeenth-century'.<sup>10</sup> As a result 'the secular judicial penalties facing Scottish Catholics were not as rigorously employed as those against their English co-religionists'.<sup>11</sup> Even under Charles I the prosecution of Catholics was, according to Maurice Lee Jr, 'sporadic and important Catholics – not only Huntly, but also people like Nithsdale, Angus and Errol – were treated very gently'.<sup>12</sup> Although some Catholics did on occasion face banishment for pernicious religious recalcitrance, generally the policies invoked by the Scottish state to deal with Catholicism were directed to the long term. This goes some way in explaining the policies of attacking Catholicism through the arrest and deportation of priests, state-imposed Protestant education for the children of pernicious recusants, and the stringent assessment of punitive fines, which tended to attack the pocketbooks of recusants rather than undermine their social rank or status.<sup>13</sup>

In fact, punitive fines were the one great tool available to the government of Scotland, especially in the Highlands, the Western Isles, and the north-east of Scotland, since the ecclesiastical power of excommunication only really had sway to the extent that it could be made manifest through the social pressures which accompanied its pronouncement: the refusal of the wider community to employ, trade, or socialize with an excommunicated individual. In certain regions of Scotland, particularly in the north-east, the temporal sting of excommunication from the Kirk could be easily remedied by a supportive community underpinned by a powerful local magnate. This left the great Catholic magnates, not the clergy, as the lynchpins of Catholic continuance. The question remains, however: why would the lay elite put themselves and their progeny's well-being at risk by persisting to espouse Catholicism? The hypothesis argued here is that the motivation rested not solely on religious grounds, but rather that the rejuvenation of Catholicism represented a direct reaction against James VI's policies directed at establishing a centralized absolute monarchy.

The policies of James VI in Scotland, in terms of religion, were more generally geared towards the ascendancy of Episcopalianism over Presbyterianism, than to opposing Catholicism. James was willing in principle to come down hard on Catholics, 'but wanted to be able to make exceptions' either for favoured nobles or during periods of delicate international relations and political turbulence.<sup>14</sup> The fact that James seems to have felt little personal enmity towards priests was exhibited in his willingness in 1585 to debate face to face with the Jesuit James Gordon, the Earl of Huntly's uncle, over the Mass. After their discourse the priest was allowed to leave, although, under pressure from ministers of the Kirk, the king forced Huntly to send his uncle abroad

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'under the penalty of ten thousand pieces of gold'.<sup>15</sup> Huntly complied, but what followed was a staged farce. The Jesuit boarded a ship in Aberdeen and hired a public notary to draw up a testimony to that effect. Yet on the following day he left the ship by a small boat and returned to Scotland where he rejoined three other Jesuits and they carried on with their work.

Perhaps more surprisingly, there is evidence that James's queen, Anne, converted to Catholicism in about 1600 and that the King tolerated her consorting with Jesuits, one of whom is supposed to have been appointed superintendent of the royal falconry, while a Scottish Jesuit appears to have served as her confessor.<sup>16</sup> That Catholicism was not a primary concern of the crown was the result of its lack of international political significance to a purely Scottish monarchy. From the latter years of the sixteenth-century, Rome's approach to restoring Scotland was, as the papal nuncio of Brussels suggested in a report dated 1596, 'mildness and conciliation' rather than the military means advocated by Father William Crichton or any of the other political intrigues postulated by Jesuits.<sup>17</sup> This was the perception of the Scottish state (apart from the case of John Ogilvie SJ)<sup>18</sup> and there was little concerted effort before the reign of Charles I to root out Catholics.

Such moderate policies meant that during the reign of James VI known Catholics, like the Catholic earls of Huntly, Angus and Errol (who were responsible for rebellion in 1589 and 1594) could, through paying mere lip-service to the Kirk, be nominally 'resaved agane in the bosome of the Church of Scotland' even though they continued to be practising Catholics in private.<sup>19</sup> This tolerance, according to Gordon Donaldson, represented a 'tenderness to Roman Catholics ... that [meant] the country was not deprived of the services of men who leaned towards Rome.'<sup>20</sup> Such tenderness, however, was not absolute and could be temporarily revoked for pragmatic reasons. In 1609–10 Huntly, Errol and Angus found themselves incarcerated. The primary motivation was to enable the crown to get episcopal legislation pushed through the 1610 General Assembly in the face of Presbyterian opposition. Soon after the King got his way, Errol and Huntly were released.<sup>21</sup> By 1617 Huntly was back on the Privy Council. Thus the key issue was overwhelmingly the recognition of central authority, not private practice.

Being linked to Catholicism did not prevent the advancement of a figure such as Huntly, who, although identified by English officials as the leading Catholic in Scotland, had been promoted to marquis in 1599. Throughout James's reign Huntly remained a close confidant and friend to the King. The fact is, Huntly and his wider Gordon networks, as well as other leading Catholic figures, did not cleave to the Catholic faith in order to either bring Scotland back to Catholicism or to undermine royal authority. They were happy to play to both Catholic and royal prerogatives in order to bolster their own regional autonomy. As Ruth Grant has described: 'Huntly was using the opportuni-

ties offered by the Counter-Reformation to further his party's domestic programme, which, by extension, may have promoted the Catholic cause as well.<sup>22</sup> By the 1580s Catholicism was highly political at the local level but not revolutionary nationally or internationally. Yet, according to John Durkan, the position of Catholics worsened after 1603.<sup>23</sup> The question is why did this take place when Catholicism was not a threat in an international political sense?

The answer rests in the increased pressure from the newly elevated status of James VI as king of Scotland, England and Ireland and his concerted efforts to secure royal dominion over traditional regional hegemonies.<sup>24</sup> This was a process that harnessed Protestant ideology and, in response, Catholicism became a banner of unity and resistance in the face of increased central pressure on traditional local privileges. This was especially true in the north-east and the Western Isles where the low cost policy of using clans as a means of enforcing centralized authority was pursued by the crown. It was a situation with roots stretching back before the union of the crowns. For example, the so-called rising of the Catholic earls in the 1580s has been billed by some historians as a Counter-Reformation political rising. However, a closer look at the perspectives of those involved presents a much more complicated picture.

In the Earl of Huntly's speech to his troops before the Battle of Glenlivet in 1594 he declared the commonly sought prize to be the defence of the Catholic faith.<sup>25</sup> According to tradition:

Huntly's retainers [including the Earl of Errol and the men he provided] prepared for battle by confession and communion. Mass was said at Auchindoun for them by Father Gordon, S.J., before they set out on their march through Glenrinnies; their weapons were sprinkled with holy water, and a cross placed on their armour symbolised that they fought in defence of the Cross of Christ.<sup>26</sup>

Crucially, however, their opponent was not identified simply as either the crown or Protestantism, *per se*, but more specifically as an invasive and infringing Highland army of Campbells set to benefit through royal service. That Catholicism and traditional hegemonies could be defended in the face of specific royal policies and yet not be anti-monarchical or viewed, at least by those in arms, as non-treasonous is demonstrated in the wake of Glenlivet. After routing a superior Campbell force marching under a royal patent, Huntly disbanded his forces before the arrival of an army commanded by the King himself. What is being argued here is that the royal policy hatched by James to use client kin groups to break down locally-based hegemonies enhanced religion as a factor for group cohesion.

Tensions between the Gordons and Campbells dated back to the policies of James II which elevated both Alexander Seton of Gordon, who changed his name to Gordon on being made first Earl of Huntly in 1444–45, and Colin Campbell, first Earl of Argyll, in order to fill gaps in the peerage. After the Refor-

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mation, and particularly in light of James VI's policies, the Campbells justified their advancement as royally sanctioned and underpinned by their acceptance of Protestantism. In response Catholicism became, for the Gordons and others, a shared badge behind which traditional regional hierarchies could be maintained; it represented the maintenance of an accepted status quo in the face of old kin based political rivalries that had been imbalanced by a change in both royal policy and state religion.

That the acceptance of the new religion favoured particular kin groups is evidenced by the meteoric rise of the Campbells in Argyll and the Keiths, Forbes and Frasers in the north-east. Perhaps even more important for the Gordons was the enhanced rival created by the elevation of the Protestant James Stewart (later regent) to the earldom of Moray in 1562 by Mary Queen of Scots, as this heightened the struggle for supremacy within the north-east region. Another rival to the hegemony of the Huntly Gordons came in the 1620s from the Marquis's brother-in-law John Erskine, sixth Earl of Mar, who enthusiastically embraced the task other nobles avoided of bringing the Catholic Gordons and their network to trial in the name of religion. He did so, according to contemporary sources, out of personal ambition rather than religious devotion.<sup>27</sup> (Likewise, in an effort to acquire the lands of John Gordon, the 13th Earl of Sutherland, the Earl of Caithness made accusations to the Archbishop of St Andrews in 1614 that Sutherland was a Catholic.)<sup>28</sup> While Barry Robertson argues that maintaining Catholicism 'essentially ... compromised' Huntly's 'chances of ever again becoming an influential force in the governance of the country and ensured that he remained on the defensive for much of the period', at the regional level, support for Catholicism reinforced the Gordon ascendancy, even beyond their immediate sphere of influence.<sup>29</sup> In 1636 the then Earl of Moray complained that he was powerless to arrest Catholics in his own territories because of their Gordon networks.<sup>30</sup> Since religion was used against Catholic magnates as a tool to challenge their traditional hegemony, religion also became a means of persistent resistance.

This kind of phenomenon was not unique to Scotland. A similar kind of political coalescence leading to a bolstered religious identity and unity was be evidenced in Ireland. Although Colm Lennon has argued for a successful project of Tridentine Counter-Reformation, it can be argued that the consolidation of any kind of united Catholic front in Ireland took place only after a series of important changes were implemented in 1613: political structures were altered to give Protestants a majority in the Irish Parliament, Catholic churches were handed over to the Church of Ireland, Catholics were again banned from holding public office and strict recusancy fines were implemented.<sup>31</sup> If these changes were not clear enough, the writing was certainly on the wall when James I denounced Catholic delegates in May that year as 'half-subjects' only entitled to 'half privileges'.<sup>32</sup> Only when it became clear that

the political voice of the nominally Catholic majority, comprising both Gael and Old English, would be undermined and excluded did concerted resistance as co-Catholics begin to significantly coalesce. It found further coherence after the 'Graces' were refused in 1634 and solidified into a malleable and temporarily unitary Catholic identity during the political turmoil of 1641–42, when Catholicism came to represent an ideological justification to Irish calls for independence through claims to a proprietary relationship with the Holy See. This was a reaction primarily to political changes and not religious ones. Catholicism became a counter force for resistance and cohesion embraced by those being marginalized.

The great difference between this process in Ireland and that of late sixteenth-century Scotland is that the aim in the latter was not political liberation from imperial domination, nor was sustained foreign Catholic support proactive or forthcoming, although both Huntly and the eighth Lord Maxwell did plead for support from Philip II of Spain. Rather, Catholicism served as a powerful bonding agent to hold social and kin groups together. It denoted a distinctive identity, which served a fundamentally important role in preserving traditional regional authority. For the Gordons, Leslies, Hays and Ogilvies, Catholicism became a core aspect of their identity, but not one which necessarily put them at odds with the state, at least from their perspective. Although it is not easy to elucidate how exactly such networks functioned on a macro level, Allan Macinnes has identified 'the Companie and Societie of the Boyis', who murdered William Brown in 1607, as 'ostensibly ... a confederacy of Catholic gentry ... a territorial grouping of kinsmen and local associates intent on upholding Gordon hegemony in the north-east'.<sup>33</sup> Alasdair Roberts has gone a step further and conjectured that a clear Jesuit connection can be circumstantially ascribed to the association.<sup>34</sup> Vested local interests and a shared Catholic faith bonded leading landowners together for mutual protection and the enforcement of an established status quo. If it was imperative for the great noble families of the sixteenth century to maintain their ascendancy against their rivals by all means available,<sup>35</sup> then for the Gordons this was consistently achieved through a cohesive identity and near constant patronage of Catholicism. By the 1590s Huntly had established himself as the leader of the Catholics in Scotland,<sup>36</sup> while reaffirming his family's traditional regional role as nothing short of 'the petty monarchs of the North'.<sup>37</sup>

In fact, the importance of Catholic identity as a primary aspect of the Gordons' power was evidenced on two occasions in the 1620s. First, according to a Protestant source, in the closing months of 1621, James Gordon, laird of Letterfourie, had a public mass held at his home and required his tenants to attend. This served as a mandatory act of public confirmation of his authority under the auspices of a religious act. According to Calderwood, more than 160 persons were present.<sup>38</sup> A second incident occurred in 1626 when,

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according to the parish minister of Rathven, one George Gordon declared after the sermon that none living in the bounds of the Marquis of Huntly 'suld frequent the heiring of the word on ye sabbath day at ye kirk of Rathven under pain of losing housis and land and under pain of incurring ye wrath of ye said Marques thair master'.<sup>39</sup> These events confirmed trends apparent to the Synod of Aberdeen in 1606 that the Gordons, principally the branches of Huntly, Newton and Gight, were primarily responsible for the persistence of Catholicism in the north-east of the country.<sup>40</sup> Yet more important than pure considerations of personal piety, the long-term support of Catholicism allowed the Gordons to broaden their influence beyond ties of kinship and the bonds of manrent. In fact, by 1628 Father James MacBreck reported that 'it is known that most of the Catholics, especially in the north of Scotland, are relatives or friends or clansmen of Huntly'.<sup>41</sup> This led to a reciprocal relationship in which the marquises of Huntly were likely to remain Catholic sympathisers owing to the fact that their powerbase was comprised largely of Catholic supporters, while subordinate lairds and the common people would remain Catholic so long as their leading magnate maintained the faith.<sup>42</sup> Thus religion created a bond of mutual dependence and support and helps to explain why in 1668 the Apostolic Prefect of Scotland, Alexander Winster, continued to record the Marquis of Huntly as the most important Catholic in the country.<sup>43</sup>

It has been argued that Catholic links were forged in the continental Scots colleges and solidified by networks of intermarriage centred on the Gordons, but this is to put the cart before the horse. It was actually the support of the faith by north-east families such as the Gordons, Menzies, Hays and Leslies that provided a flow of students to the continental colleges. Only 40 per cent of those students who enrolled in any of the four Scots colleges received ordination during 1575–1799, despite the supposed requirement of signing a missionary oath within six months of enrolling in a college.<sup>44</sup> One of the ways around this was to leave the school without finishing or before any oath had to be sworn. In Rome, where 163 Scots students enrolled between 1602 and 1650, at least fifty students left the college before finishing and having to sign an oath.<sup>45</sup> In this context the colleges served primarily not as missionary training bases, but rather as an alternative educational option to the universities in Scotland that required a Protestant confession of faith. Hence, continental colleges offered a launch pad to a world of non-religious careers such as those demonstrated by Thomas Dempster and George Strachan. By contrast, those secular priests apprehended and banished from Scotland received no support from the colleges prior to 1655, when the Paris college began to offer short-term refuge. Priests had to rely on their ability to provide for themselves or more likely on support from their kin networks; the numerous reports of missionaries staying with family members even extended to relatives who were Protestant ministers.<sup>46</sup> Kin networks played a greater role in the supply of

students for the colleges and support for the missionaries in Scotland than the colleges did in solidifying such links.

While the colleges were not the seed-bed of Scottish networks, they were of the utmost importance for wider European contacts. Scottish Catholics certainly perceived themselves to be part of a wider community of faith, if not necessarily wholly subject to it. The Gordons viewed themselves as a European, rather than merely a Scottish, dynastic presence.<sup>47</sup> In fact, the Huntly understanding of their wider secular and spiritual context was expressed in stone with the production of a new coat of arms above the entrance at Huntly Castle in 1605. Apart from depicting the family arms, the monument placed at the heart of Gordon identity the five wounds of Christ, the Virgin Mary, St John, the text of Galatians 6:14 in Latin declaring 'God forbid that I should glory save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ', and above all of this a depiction of the risen Christ in Glory with the inscription: 'I rise again with Divine Power.'

Yet the heraldic declaration had a political as well as a religious aspect. On either side of the religious iconography were the Scottish Lion and the double-headed eagle of the Holy Roman Empire. The Gordons of Huntly recognized their political locus both in Scotland and within the wider European context, and they also knew, like other north-east families, the role that religion played in preserving this.<sup>48</sup> In a series of articles, Ian Bryce and Alasdair Roberts have identified a number of architectural features from the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries common in Scottish Catholic homes of the north-east that have led them to argue that this shared use of common symbols (including the *Arma Christi* and possibly cross-shaped gun loops) is evidence of a collective political and religious identity among the Gordons, Hays, Leslies and beyond. Perhaps most importantly, as they argue, these religious symbols were not linked to religious buildings such as churches, but rather to the 'castles and houses belonging to the aristocracy and gentry'.<sup>49</sup> This is indicative of the primary role of these powerful families in the persistence of Catholicism in Scotland and of the importance Catholic faith had in cementing them together, and it provides further evidence that these bonds were not essentially clerically forged or initiated.

To a significant extent Catholic clergy in Scotland operated free of strict centralized oversight. The rigid hierarchy and structure which has been ascribed to Scottish Catholicism is misleading in relation to the seventeenth century.<sup>50</sup> Although the regular clergy made reports to their respective superiors, they were few in number and suffered from poor communication. Even the Jesuits, who were the most numerous (except perhaps for the Irish missions to the Western Isles in the 1620s), only ever averaged between six and ten priests working in the country at any one time between 1580 and 1650.<sup>51</sup> The lack of central direction and funding has led Fiona MacDonald to describe the early missions to the Highlands, Jesuit or otherwise, as resulting

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largely from 'the priest's personal zeal for sustaining their countrymen' and resting on their own 'ability to attract the necessary stipends'.<sup>52</sup> Prior to the 1650s the missionary efforts in Scotland, whether secular or regular, depended overwhelmingly on financial support from the Scottish landed elite because there was no mechanism in place to centrally organize a mission or distribute funds. Even the renewed Jesuit mission from 1617 struggled for such a functioning structure. Moreover, although *Propaganda Fide* (founded 1622) included a particular remit for Scotland by 1623, no Apostolic Prefect was appointed for direct oversight of secular missions in Scotland until 1653. In fact, according to the public recantation of the lapsed Jesuit Thomas Abernethie, while over 3,000 priests were working in the mission fields of England there were only eighteen in all of Scotland.<sup>53</sup>

These numbers were hardly sufficient for an authoritarian and structured ecclesiastical hierarchy. Moreover, Jesuits, Franciscans, Dominicans and secular clergy all acted independently and to some degree vied as rivals for control over Scottish missionary endeavours, which did little to coalesce into a united voice for Rome.<sup>54</sup> The Dominican George Fanning ministered to the island of Barra for over seventeen years before he was discovered by two Franciscan missionaries in 1677. He apparently had no permission from *Propaganda* nor did *Propaganda* seem to have any knowledge of his presence.<sup>55</sup> This situation, echoed elsewhere, required the priest's sustenance to be provided by the local gentry, which in turn created a situation in where the patron had a proprietary relationship with the priest.<sup>56</sup> In the case of Fanning he was reported to have lived with the laird of Barra upon whom he depended for his survival.<sup>57</sup> In another example, the Marchioness of Huntly reportedly gave the Jesuits working in Scotland 2,000 scudi in order to sustain their work and yet they persisted in being 'exceedingly poor'.<sup>58</sup> In both these cases powerful lay people represented the sole, or at least primary, source sustaining the Catholic clergy. In Scotland the continuance of Roman Catholicism came to depend heavily on powerful lay Catholics and the laity of Scotland attained a degree of prominence and independence not enjoyed by the Catholic laity of many other countries.

This required Jesuits and other priests working in Scotland to work in a paradigm in which they received direct patronage from powerful lay individuals. This was almost certainly the case for James MacBreck who wrote in 1640 that he was the lone priest working in the southern part of Scotland for the past two years.<sup>59</sup> Alphons Bellesheim, writing from a clerical perspective, explained the relationship as one in which 'special preachers were appointed to each of the noble families of Huntly, Errol, Angus, Home, and Herries, and charged with the task of converting the whole household'.<sup>60</sup> Yet, this simplistic description fails to elucidate the reciprocal nature of these relationships and the benefits for both priest and laity in a situation where continental authori-

ties failed to provide adequately for priests. The laity's persistent support allowed for the continuance of the Catholic faith in Scotland through the provision of a clerical presence and protection from persecution, while the priests working in Scotland were able to carry out their ministry despite a near complete lack of funds from ecclesiastical sources. In describing his mission to superiors on the continent, the Jesuit Robert Crombie explained how he sought safety during Holy Week 1604 in Huntly Castle. Rather than passing on to further mission fields he remained for over a year 'under the protection of the marquis of Huntly, where I continue to carry on the work of our Society'.<sup>61</sup> This seems to be a model that became the norm. In a report to Rome in 1628 the six Jesuits working in Scotland were all identified as being based in politically powerful households. Father William Leslie based himself out of the Earl of Errol's residence in Cruden Bay, Patrick Stickwell with the Marquis of Huntly, James MacBreck with the French ambassador, Robert Valens with the Earl of Abercorn, and George Christie with the Countess of Linlithgow.<sup>62</sup> Although Bellesheim and MacLean interpreted this system as being similar to Jesuits living as chaplains in the homes of prominent families, yet, whether the priests were regulars or not, the situation was not always officially reported as such to their superiors.<sup>63</sup>

The degree to which the prominence of the Catholic laity had a bearing on the experience of clergy working in Scotland may be indicated by the case of the secular priest Gilbert Blakhall. In his own account of his mission to Scotland in the 1630s and 1640s he declared the influence of Lady Aboyne to be such that 'the ministers ... never troubled me as long as she livd, although they knew wel aneugh, and did know when I did go away to mak my visites'. The importance of this Gordon matriarch is further expounded upon by Father Leslie who had served as the chaplain of Lady Aboyne but was arrested and taken to Aberdeen in 1647. While incarcerated in Aberdeen, Lesley found a significant degree of support, even from non-Catholics, hospitality which no doubt derived from his relationship to Lady Aboyne.<sup>64</sup> The first Marquis of Huntly, Lady Aboyne's father-in-law, called by one priest 'the most powerful protector of the Catholic cause ... extremely formidable to his opponents',<sup>65</sup> could offer protection in much more proactive forms. The Privy Council records for December 1628 list over forty individuals in the north-east of Scotland, primarily within the bounds of Huntly's sphere of influence, who not only reserpt priests, but accompany 'them through the country, armed with unlawful weapons'. A few days later the Privy Council complained that the major obstacle to apprehending the priests, who they deemed 'most pernicious pests in this commonweal', was that fact that Huntly overawed all who might molest them.<sup>66</sup> When in the following year, as sheriff of Aberdeen and Inverness, the Marquis of Huntly refused to apprehend Catholics within his jurisdiction he was outlawed and excommunicated. However, he managed to

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both bring himself back into favour and to continue to protect Catholics. On the condition that Huntly relinquish his role of sheriff, the crown granted that position to the Earl of Enzie (Huntly's son) along with a stipend of £60,000 Scots, and alleviated them of their responsibilities for pursuing Catholics in the two shires. Therefore, through a moderate act of self-sacrifice Huntly managed to extend an increased level of protection to Catholics.<sup>67</sup>

Beyond protection, powerful magnates and their networks also provided the much needed money required to sustain priests, as reports abound of promised funds from continental sources being in long-term arrears. It has been argued that for seculars it was impossible to remain and work in Scotland without a patron or the support of kin networks.<sup>68</sup> Perhaps the clearest indication of the importance that the clergy of Scotland placed on their lay patrons is demonstrated by the newly appointed Apostolic Prefect of Scotland in 1653. That year the Marchioness of Huntly requested William Ballantine to travel to France in order to be present at her sister's profession to a community of nuns. En route, the ship Ballantine travelled on was seized at Ostend and he was forced to take an unwanted detour through England where he was arrested and imprisoned.<sup>69</sup> The question arises: why would he put both himself and, much more importantly, the whole mission at risk after it had taken almost thirty years for *Propaganda* to appoint a resident Apostolic Prefect? His travel at the Marchioness's request tends to indicate that Ballantine viewed her continued favour as being of the highest value and fundamentally important to the ongoing success of *Propaganda's* mission; more important than even his presence in Scotland. This is immensely telling in terms of where the onus and importance of the mission rested. There was, in fact, such a severe dependence on the laity that some missionaries felt uncomfortable, while others felt debilitated by their inability to reprimand wayward Catholics. For example, the Capuchin Archangel Leslie complained in 1626 that many Scots Catholics attended the Kirk, but he felt unable to reprimand them out of fear he might be denied access to their homes.<sup>70</sup> This fear was not based on the need to access Catholics for the purposes of ministry, however, because he suggests it could be remedied by a stipend of 200 florins to the priests.<sup>71</sup>

This was a system that worked well in a climate of moderate policies against recusants. However, during the reign of Charles I anti-Catholic policies intensified, not because of personal antipathy towards Catholicism, but rather as a means to distance the King's own Episcopalian manoeuvrings from Calvinist accusations of popery. By the latter 1620s the Jesuits working in Scotland, succumbing to pressures from their English counterparts and continental superiors, had abandoned earlier patterns of leniency and required stringent public professions in cases of inquiry by the authorities.<sup>72</sup> Although the repercussions were generally limited to fines, Catholic adherents asked if there was

an easier way to salvation.<sup>73</sup> In some secular and regular alternatives to the Jesuits the Scots laity found the answer that there could be.

Some clergy demonstrated a degree of double dealing in order to both placate their rather far removed superiors and cater for the needs of those they ministered to. Thus some priests encouraged their flocks to steer a middle way between being persecuted and lapsing from the true faith by enlisting a number of tactics: claims of taking communion in other parish churches; challenging parish boundaries; claiming to be too sick to attend church; or, pleading for time to get advice and reflect upon their consciences.<sup>74</sup> When put on the spot some Catholics would attend Protestant communion and either actually take the elements or feign taking them.<sup>75</sup> Indeed, a number of Jesuits between the 1580s and the beginning of the seventeenth century had noted the necessity of allowing Catholics who would not be tempted to abandon the faith to attend Kirk services. Despite orders from the general of the Jesuit order in 1598 to desist from the practice, Father Murdoch wrote in 1606 that their success up to that point had depended on this leniency.<sup>76</sup> Sometimes the maintenance of the faith within a family fell upon the wife, who employed a Catholic chaplain, while the husband outwardly conformed to the Kirk. Accusations of this type against peeresses were levied at the houses of Huntly, Angus, Nithsdale and Abercorn.<sup>77</sup> For high-profile figures a degree of acquiescence to central demands for external conformity usually ensured the maintenance of traditional local powers.<sup>78</sup> On no less than four occasions Huntly conformed to the Kirk before reasserting himself as Scotland's leading Catholic. Similarly, through his outward conformity to the Kirk, the family of the Marquis of Douglas, including his wife, a daughter of Huntly, managed to continue their Catholic faith at home for more than a decade.<sup>79</sup>

The key issue here is not simply the lengths that Scottish Catholics went to in order to satisfy authorities, but rather the degree of sanction given to them to do this by the clergy. It appears that the Jesuits had become stricter in their expectations than secular priests. The stringent demands of Jesuits, who reported that persecution 'occasioned many not bad Catholics to make a lamentable shipwreck of their faith', did not tolerate outward conformity to the Kirk, which brought the criticism from the laity that 'it was easy for those to give advice who had no goods, or if they had, need not bewail the loss since they could take refuge in their colleges abroad'.<sup>80</sup> Seculars, on the other hand, actually seem to have encouraged a more canny approach.

During the Interregnum secular priests conspired with leading Catholic laity to compose declarations that denounced Presbyterian authority without openly declaring their faith. John Walker, a secular priest living in Drum Castle, helped Alexander Irving to produce a series of letters which denied 'Ecclesiastick and Politick Poperie'. Similar declarations were made elsewhere in the north-east, including Strathbogie. It is possible that a similar proclamation

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by William Gordon of Avachy, a Catholic schoolteacher, was aided by William Ballantine before he became Apostolic Prefect of Scotland in 1653. Whether directly involved or not, Ballantine almost certainly had knowledge of such policies and sanctioned them. Despite Irving's rejection of 'popery', Ballantine reported three years after the very public incident that the laird and his family remained among the faithful.<sup>81</sup> Importantly, others who publicly denounced their faith, or at least outwardly conformed to the Kirk, were also reported as being constant Catholics. The laird and lady of Fetternear, after a long series of run-ins with the local kirk session, promised to improve their attendance to the Kirk and rejected popery in 1648, yet Ballantine still identified them as Catholics of good standing in his 1654 and 1660 reports. He did the same for the marquis of Douglas's family.<sup>82</sup> This lenient approach by the secular clergy, who reappeared with a concerted mission in Scotland in the 1650s, helps to explain Alasdair Roberts' claim that 'even those who remained Catholic began to reject the Society of Jesus, preferring secular priests under a new ecclesiastical rule' which he suggests led to a 'spirit of tolerance in Scottish Catholicism'.<sup>83</sup> Perhaps the leniency of Ballantine's secular mission was one of necessity or depended, at least partially, on the fact that they were so understaffed. Although responsible for the whole country, their numbers never exceeded six missionaries during the Interregnum.<sup>84</sup>

The importance of lay patronage to the continuance of Catholicism in Scotland is of fundamental importance for understanding the history of Scottish Catholicism. Even on the continent this was recognized to be true. Father James Anderson wrote from Douai to colleagues in Rome in February 1654 lamenting the death of Huntly and declaring: 'I pray God that the next Marquis be Catholic also, that wee may drink our pynt aill in the raws with greater freedom and mirrines.'<sup>85</sup> In the wake of the Restoration, and despite the hopes of a more positive settlement for Catholics under Charles II than they had received from his father, the established status quo of lay dominance continued, as is evidenced by a lack of internal structure and the clergy's continued proximity to, and dependence upon, prominent lay families.<sup>86</sup> Such patronage reached its height in the reign of James VII who granted a chapel for Catholic use and in 1687 moved to establish a Jesuit school in Edinburgh.

While priests in Scotland did meet on an irregular basis in Gordon Castle, Strathglass or Glengarry, the type of structure present in Ireland or England remained non-existent in Scotland.<sup>87</sup> Scotland did not even have a semi-permanent official representative in the degraded role of Apostolic Prefect until 1653. The mission was staffed by a skeletal crew with little direct oversight and riddled with internal rivalries. It was not until a century after the equivalent appointment had taken place in Ireland that Thomas Nicolson was appointed vicar apostolic in 1694. It was under his vigorous and authoritative leadership that boundaries for priests were established in 1701, the ministry in the

Highlands and Lowlands was properly linked and the first priest since the Reformation was ordained in Scotland in 1704.<sup>88</sup> Most importantly, in relation to this chapter, the centrality of the laity and their pre-eminent role began to wane with the appointment of Nicolson.

So far this chapter has argued for a greater role of the laity in the continuance of Catholicism in Lowland Scotland than has traditionally been recognized. Similar patterns can be extrapolated from the meagre source material recording the reintroduction of Catholicism in Gaelic Scotland.<sup>89</sup> For ClanDonald, the policies of James VI, in particular the Statutes of Iona and the aggressive expansion of ClanCampbell under the ideological banner of Protestantism, had marginalized a kin group whose power had been waning since the 1480s. As with the Gordons in the north-east, a concerted effort to support the Catholic faith followed, which represented a means to reassert traditional hegemonies now under attack. Catholic mission to the Western Isles can be traced back to a request from an anonymous MacDonald in 1618.<sup>90</sup> From the start, the Franciscan mission was based in the ClanDonald lands of Randall MacDonnell, Viscount Dunluce (later Earl of Antrim), operating from 1619 until 1646 from the Franciscan priory of Bonamargy in Ulster. It depended heavily on the continued support and the protection offered by ClanDonald, and the financial influence of the MacDonnells of Antrim can be discerned throughout the mission; as late as 1671 the Marquis of Antrim was identified as an important benefactor.<sup>91</sup>

Even after the Franciscan mission, abated ClanDonald continued to support Catholicism in its bounds, with Clanranald's South Uist and the MacDonnells' Glengarry serving as the new epicentres of activity, along with McNeill's Barra.<sup>92</sup> Catholicism became such an important part of ClanDonald identity that in the absence of promised continental funds elements within the clan *fine* supported the work themselves throughout the second half of the seventeenth century. For instance, two Catholic schools were functioning in the West of Scotland from the 1660s. The school in Glengarry was promised funds by *Propaganda* in 1665 to employ a schoolmaster. Although the funds to pay him never actually arrived he was supported by the chief. Likewise, the school in Barra also required local support.<sup>93</sup> This led to a situation, like that in the north-east of Scotland, in which priests were closely linked to patrons. The Vincentian Francis White, although not receiving explicit permission from *Propaganda* to reside with Glengarry on a permanent basis, was allowed, owing to the inclement weather of the region, to stay at Invergarry Castle from October to May – two-thirds of the year;<sup>94</sup> Invergarry Castle was reckoned to have 'provided a base for Highland mission equivalent to that for the Lowlands at Gordon Castle'.<sup>95</sup>

The close fusion between clan identity and religion was made manifest in several different ways. For instance, when the Franciscan Patrick Hegarty was

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arrested by the Bishop of the Isles in 1630 some clansmen of Clanranald and Benebecula 'followed the said bishop and his company, presented their arms at them, and forcibly took the said priest out of their hands'.<sup>96</sup> This tends to suggest that the priests were perceived as part of the clans and they were thus redeemed in a manner consistent with this belief.<sup>97</sup> In fact, there is evidence to indicate that this feeling was reciprocated. In the wake of the Popish Plot in 1678 the crown ordered all clans to disarm. The MacDonnells refused and with the assistance of 'other Popish chiefs' marched upon the Campbells in 1679.<sup>98</sup> The campaign was as thoroughly anti-Campbell as it was religious, but the fact that these two elements had blurred into one is evidenced by the enlistment of the missionaries Francis MacDonnell and Robert Munro as soldiers in Glengarry's army.<sup>99</sup> This represents an even more proactive role than their fellow Franciscans serving Irish regiments on the continent.

Referring to the MacDonnells of Glengarry during the second half of the seventeenth century, Lisa Curry argues that the primary opponent of the clan was not the British state, but rather Calvinism because 'the strongly protestant-based authority in Scotland was at times unsympathetic and on occasion openly hostile to the MacDonnells' society, language and culture and was consistently opposed to their Catholic religion'.<sup>100</sup> This, however, is to misidentify the impetus. The MacDonnells did not reject Protestantism or the British state because of a deep-rooted and long-held devotion to the Catholic faith. Rather, they embraced Catholicism as an ideological antidote to the infringing policies of an expansionist British state. Catholicism became embedded in ClanDonald lands only after 1619, in what was largely a religious vacuum, and served to formulate an alternative identity in opposition to the encroachments of ClanCampbell and royal policies. It might be closer to the mark to suggest that Catholicism linked into existing 'political and cultural attitudes of Clan MacDonnell of Glengarry ... to emphasize the differences between' themselves and 'the rest of mainland Britain',<sup>101</sup> though the point can be missed that leading figures in ClanDonald were proactive in appropriating Catholicism for that very purpose.<sup>102</sup>

It might be argued that the greatest factors in solidifying Catholicism as a political and kin identity was not the Reformation, but rather royal policy and the ambition of the Campbells and other client clans. The Campbells had long been a force their neighbours had to reckon with, but royal policies after 1603 utilized their ambitions to provide a low-cost and effective tool for procuring a model of monarchical authority much more akin to those of continental Europe than Scotland had previously experienced. From 1603 the crown did not wish to wholly undermine the power of the Gordons or other Catholic magnates, except for those of ClanDonald and their Gaelic world. Instead, the crown sought to contain them and maintain equilibrium between local and regional hegemonies so that in the power dynamic between the centre and

the peripheries the authority exerted by the crown would be paramount. Yet in intervening in traditional hegemonic rivalries, James VI's policies of utilizing and mobilizing client clans under a Protestant banner actually served to elicit a reassertion of traditional regional hegemonies and a rejuvenation of Catholicism. In the Gaelic west, the north-east and to a degree among the Maxwells of the south-west, Catholicism became an embedded part of some kin groups' identities and an ideological justification for asserting traditional rights in the face of government-sanctioned, Protestant-blessed incursions. Whereas Allan MacInnes interprets the minority nature of Catholicism by the 1680s as an indication that it did not fill a formational role in the Western Isles, he accepts 'a sustained history of Catholic recusancy' from Upper Deeside across the North and Central Highlands to 'the Braes of Lochaber, Moidart, Arisaig, Morar and Knoydart in the western Highlands and on to the Small Isles of Eigg and Canna, Barra, South Uist and Benbecula'.<sup>103</sup> Importantly this regional description of Catholic persistence precisely outlines the areas in which concerted efforts among kin groups, including Clan Donald and the Gordons, protected hegemonic claims and maintained a Catholic presence for political purposes. Although the introduction of a rigid Catholic hierarchy from 1694, the expulsion of the Stuart dynasty in 1689, and the Union of 1707, would fundamentally alter the political and religious landscape of the eighteenth century, the circumstances of the previous century certainly had a bearing on the events that followed. Moreover, many of the kin-based strategies for Catholic maintenance in the seventeenth century continued to be reflected in the following century.<sup>104</sup>

## NOTES

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- 3 Ruth Grant, 'The Brig o' Dee Affair, the sixth earl of Huntly and the politics of the Counter-Reformation', in J. Goodare and M. Lynch (eds) *The reign of James VI* (Edinburgh, 2000), p. 103; Alphons Bellesheim, *History of the Catholic Church of Scotland*, trans. O. H. Blair (4 vols, Edinburgh and London, 1887–90), vol. 3, pp. 449–50.
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- 6 Jane E. A. Dawson, 'Calvinism and the *Gaidhealtachd* in Scotland', in A. Duke, G. Lewis and A. Pettegree (eds), *Calvinism in Europe, 1560–1620* (Cambridge, 1994), pp. 231–53.

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- 15 Bellesheim, *History*, vol. 3, p. 339.
- 16 *Ibid.*, pp. 347–8, 450–5; Gordon Donaldson, *The Edinburgh history of Scotland: James V to James VII* (Edinburgh and London, 1965), p. 220.
- 17 Bellesheim, *History*, vol. 3, pp. 355, 469.
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- 19 Macdonald, *Missions to the Gaels*, p. 26.
- 20 Donaldson, *James V to James VII*, p. 220.
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