

The Vatican's Attack on Britain

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Pope Benedict XVI has succeeded where Guy Fawkes failed.

Britain's skies will light up with fireworks and the glow of bonfires and burning effigies next Thursday when millions of English celebrate Guy Fawkes Night.

Despite the festivities, it will be a night of sobering irony.

Bonfire Night, as it's also called, marks the anniversary of the Catholic plot to annihilate the English government by blowing up the Houses of Parliament—filled at the time with politicians, including King James I and most of the Anglican aristocracy—in their opening session on Nov. 5, 1605.

Although the attack was thwarted, and the Catholic assassins were rounded up, prosecuted, then hung, drawn and quartered, November 5 continued as an annual celebration. A celebration of Britain's indomitable independence from Europe. Of the miraculous fortitude of the English monarchy. And, most significantly, of the failed attempt by Catholics to conquer Anglican England.

Catch the irony?

For years, the Vatican has stashed gunpowder under the rotting floorboards of the Church of England. (Lambeth Palace, via its self-damaging liberalism, has helped facilitate its own demise.) Then last week, the Vatican lit the fuse when it announced that it had created a path by which disgruntled Anglicans might return to the Catholic fold. The pope, as A.N. Wilson put it in the *New York Times*, has “parked his tanks on the Church of England's lawn.”

But that's not all he did.

Pope Benedict XVI has essentially succeeded where Guy Fawkes failed: He's inflicted a death blow on the institution largely responsible for defining British sovereignty, empowering Britain's historic independence from Europe and forging Britain as a global power. In other words, he attacked Britain.

This is no exaggeration. “The Church of England has been the religious expression of [Britain's] independent national identity which signaled the rise of Britain as a significant world power,” observed Wilson, a British liberal whose revisionist skew on history underpins his praise of Benedict's assault on the Church of England. “It will formally bring to an end the idea of the Established Church, and of the monarchy as that Establishment's symbol and head” (emphasis mine throughout).

Wilson—despite his reveling in what he excitedly sees as an attack on the Church of England, the British monarchy and the institution at the heart of Britain's “independent national identity”—recognizes the central and historic role of the Anglican Church in British history. Even revisionist liberals don't deny this history; Britain's existence as a sovereign state and global power is inextricably linked to the Anglican Church.

Most people know the Church of England was born, with Henry VIII acting as its midwife, in the mid-16th century. Less widely known, however, is that it was conceived in the 5th century. “One of the reasons why the Reformation was successful in England,” writes British historian Paul Johnson, “was that there was absolutely nothing new about it. All its elements—anti-clericalism, anti-papalism, the exaltation of the crown in spiritual matters, the envy of clerical property, even the yearning for doctrinal reform—were deeply rooted in the English past” (*The Offshore Islanders*, emphasis mine).

Even from its conception, “British Christianity,” with its infectious spirit of independence, played a central role in the establishment of Britain as an independent power distinct in many features from its Catholic neighbors on the Continent. Early British leaders, explains Johnson, wielded English Christianity as a force for legitimizing decisions, enforcing law and establishing the credibility of government. “The church became the principle instrument of civil government; the bishops were the king's chief advisers, his chapel servants as well as spiritual ministers. The church codified the law, and put it in writing. Even before the church came, English society was developing a definite structure: But the church supplied the literate manpower and expertise to build a state machine” (ibid.).

The contributions of “British Christianity” went beyond the fundamental yet stoic establishment of English law and government. Britain's distinct breed of Christianity infused Englishmen, on an emotional and spiritual level, with a profound and enduring sense of national identity. After the Act of Appeals in 1533 established the monarch as the titular head of the church, the sworn “defender of the faith,” English kings and queens enjoyed the loyalty of English men, women and children whose “Christian” devotion inspired a willingness to sacrifice blood, sweat and tears for “God, king and country.”

"The Anglican Communion is one of the *last vestiges of the old British Empire*," observed the *Wall Street Journal* last week. "Faith followed trade and the flag, planting the Anglican Church in far-flung places such as Singapore, Tanzania, Canada and South Africa." It would be hard to overstate the impact of the Church of England on Britain's history, not only its distinct spiritual and moral existence, but even its influence on the establishment and evolution of its laws and government, and Britain's expansion as a global empire.

The significance of the Vatican's announcement last week is magnified profoundly when considered in this context. When the pope struck at the institution at the heart of British sovereignty and power, the institution largely responsible for shaping English national character and for empowering the inhabitants of the diminutive little isle with an indomitable spirit of independence, he didn't merely park his tanks on the lawn at Lambeth Palace.

He parked his tanks on Downing Street, and on the grounds of Buckingham Palace!

Two years ago, when it was leaked that the Vatican was working on a way to reunite with Anglicans *Trumpet* editor in chief [Gerald Flurry](#) wrote: "Britain suffered some of its worst nightmares when the Catholic Church reigned over it. However, the people have forgotten that oppressive history. Now, *they are about to embrace the Catholic Church again.*"

The arrival of Guy Fawkes Night next Thursday affords the English a special opportunity. If you live in England, take a moment, before you light the fireworks and torch the bonfires, to meditate on the oppressive history of that day. Cast your mind back to Nov. 5, 1605. Celebrate the failure of Guy Fawkes to annihilate your government more than 400 years ago.

More importantly, be deeply sobered, even moved to action, by the revelation last week that Pope Benedictvi has succeeded where Guy Fawkes failed. •

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