Reformations in Britain's Islands

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Historians of the Reformations have increasingly explored a comparative 'British' dimension, seeking to transcend the separate national historiographies of England, Scotland and Ireland. To date, however, little attempt has been made to survey patterns of religious change across the multiplicity of islands that came to form part of the composite British monarchy: in particular, the Channel Islands, Isles of Scilly, Isle of Man, Western Isles, Orkney and Shetland. This article argues that attention to the collective experience of islands enhances our understanding of the implementation and reception of religious change, requiring us to think more carefully about questions of environment, law, language and culture, and about the aims and achievements of confessional state-formation. The 'frontier' status of islands also underlines the interconnectedness of British Reformations with developments elsewhere in Europe.

In October 1604, the recently enthroned King James I, in a proclamation announcing his preferred regnal style, set out the terms of a new political geography. He intended to 'discontinue the divided names of England and Scotland' and adopt 'the name and style of King of Great Britain'. 'Palpable signs' indicated God's will for England and Scotland to be one: 'the Isle within itself hath almost none but imaginarie bounds of separation; without, but one common limit or rather Gard of the Ocean Sea, making the whole a little world'. There was, moreover, 'a communitie of language, the principall meanes of Civil societie', and 'an unitie of Religion, the chiefest band of heartie Union'.[1] It was a stirring adjuration, but James's contentions, on all these counts, were at best questionable. Particularly disingenuous

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[1] James F. Larkin and Paul L. Hughes, eds, *Stuart Royal Proclamations*, 2 vols (Oxford, 1973–83), 1: 95–7.

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was the equation of his newly conjoined realms with a single contiguous land mass, 'the isle'.

In 1603, of course, James acquired kingship over another significant isle. But Ireland (with whose much-discussed history this article will not concern itself) accounted for only part of the composite Stewart monarchy's geographically fragmented character. By some calculations, more than six thousand islands surround the coasts of 'Great Britain', the great majority of them in offshore Scotland. When we include the Channel Islands, about 130 British isles are permanently inhabited today, though the figure was probably closer to 200 at the turn of the seventeenth century, a not inconsiderable augmentation of James's 'little world'.[2]

It is the contention of this article that an alertness to the experience of Britain's offshore islands brings into clearer focus some of the characteristic features, and intrinsic challenges, of the polity inherited by the early Stuart monarchy. More particularly, it seeks to offer a new perspective on the Reformations underway in that polity for more than two generations when James acquired the English throne. Applying an 'island lens' or 'island frame', I will argue, enhances our understanding of patterns of religious change in Britain in at least two key and complementary ways. In the first place, the reformation of religion in a wide variety of islands – James VI and I's rhetorical obliviousness notwithstanding – was a matter of real significance for ecclesiastical and secular authority. Islands were occasionally forgotten or neglected, but they were often seen to possess considerable symbolic and practical importance, representing both 'problem' and 'prize' in schemes of political and religious imperium. The ways in which centrally sanctioned authority sought to incorporate them, and the compromises it was sometimes prepared to make in doing so, shed light on what 'religious uniformity' actually meant, as an ideal and an attainment, in the British Reformation context.

In the second place, islands invite – demand even – a 'decentred' assessment of the Reformation, in ways that other types of local society, frequently dragooned into service as historiographical 'case studies', usually do not. Islands, then as now, are self-evidently different,

[2] David W. Moore, *The Other British Isles: A History of Shetland, Orkney, the Hebrides, Isle of Man, Anglesey, Scilly, Isle of Wight and the Channel Islands* (Jefferson, NC, 2005), 1. For a 'List of islands of the British Isles', see online at: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_islands_of_the_British_Isles>, accessed 4 July 2024.

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distinctive places, with clearly defined boundaries and their own unique histories and culture. They resist easy assimilation into grand narratives of historical development, a reason, perhaps, why they are often omitted from them. And yet islands were never simply places apart, separate and self-contained. The very category of 'island' implies a geographical and conceptual relationship to some other, larger entity. Early modern islanders had their own identities and priorities, but were usually acutely aware of the wider world, and the risks and opportunities it offered them. Foregrounding their experience encourages us to move beyond simplistic binaries of 'success' and 'failure' in studying the Reformation, and to appreciate better how the local conditions of its reception produced a variety of distinct yet 'entangled' outcomes across the British Isles.[3] Placing islands at the centre rather than the margins of analysis involves a close attentiveness to issues of environment, law, language and culture; to negotiations and accommodations, spoken and unspoken, of central authority with local communities and regional powerbrokers; to gaps between the ideological claims and practical achievements of confessional state-formation; and to the inextricable enmeshment of the Reformation in Britain with developments elsewhere.

A comprehensive analytical survey of the Reformation and Counter-Reformation in the islands of Britain has not hitherto been attempted, and this article can offer only a preliminary sketch of how it might look. Certainly, an aspiration among early modern historians to write conjoined histories of the British Isles is well-established. For a generation and more, scholars have sought to transcend separate English, Scottish, Irish and Welsh historiographies with the aim of producing holistic and inter-connected 'British History'. An initial driver was the so-called 'British Problem' as a cause of the mid-seventeenth-century crisis of the Stuart monarchy, but after a slew of important publications around the turn of the current century, the historiographical momentum appears to have slowed. Historians of religion in a broader frame have followed

[3] The historiographical shift away from comparative history, and towards methodologies known variously as 'transfer history', 'histoire croisée' and 'entangled history', typically has a global and transnational emphasis. For an overview, see Sönke Bauck and Thomas Maier, 'Entangled History', *InterAmerican Wiki: Terms – Concepts – Critical Perspectives* (2015), online at: <https://uni-bielefeld.de/einrichtungen/cias/wiki/e/entangled-history.xml>, accessed 4 July 2024. Islands, however, serve as a reminder that national polities, particularly the emergent ones of the early modern era, have their own histories of entanglement.

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this lead, however, and we now possess several valuable studies of 'British' Reformation culture and politics.[4]

The principal aim of such research, however, has been to bring into dialogue the national histories of the three kingdoms. Despite adoption by numerous historians of the phrase 'Atlantic archipelago', islands as such have played relatively little role in this scholarship. The sole synoptic early modern overview is David Cressy's *England's Islands in a Sea of Troubles*, which, as its title suggests, deals only with the two dozen or so inhabited English islands (including the Channel Islands), along with Anglesey in Wales.[5] John Pocock, intellectual godfather of the new British history, titled his collected essays *The Discovery of Islands*.[6] But the only islands about which he has much to say are Great Britain and Ireland. Recent work by Alison Cathcart is more genuinely 'archipelagic' in its attentiveness to the significance of offshore islands for the state-building agenda of the Stewart monarchy, before and after 1603.[7] But the Reformation as such has not been a central focus of Cathcart's research, while the Atlantic archipelago's smaller islands feature only to a limited extent in three generally excellent volumes arising from a Trinity College, Dublin, project on 'Insular Christianity, 1530–1750'.[8]

[4] Seminal contributions include Conrad Russell, *The Causes of the English Civil War* (Oxford, 1990), 109–30; Steven G. Ellis and Sarah Barber, eds, *Conquest and Union: Fashioning a British State, 1485–1725* (London and New York, 1995); Brendan Bradshaw and John Morrill, eds, *The British Problem, c.1534–1707: State Formation in the Atlantic Archipelago* (Basingstoke, 1996); Brendan Bradshaw and Peter Roberts, eds, *British Consciousness and Identity: The Making of Britain* (Cambridge, 1998); Glenn Burgess, ed., *The New British History: Founding a Modern State 1603–1715* (London, 1999). On British Reformations, see Felicity Heal, *Reformation in Britain and Ireland* (Oxford, 2003); Ian Hazlett, *The Reformation in Britain and Ireland* (Edinburgh, 2003); Clare Kellar, *Scotland, England and the Reformation, 1534–1561* (Oxford, 2003); Alec Ryrie, *The Age of Reformation: The Tudor and Stewart Realms*, 3rd edn (London, 2024; first publ. 2009).

[5] David Cressy, *England's Islands in a Sea of Troubles* (Oxford, 2020).

[6] J. G. A. Pocock, *The Discovery of Islands: Essays in British History* (Cambridge, 2005).

[7] Alison Cathcart, 'The Maritime Dimension to Plantation in Ulster, *c.*1550–*c.*1600', *Journal of the North Atlantic*, special volume 12 (2019), 95–111; eadem, 'Island Empire: James VI and I and the Isle of Man in an Archipelagic Context', in Neil McIntyre and Alison Cathcart, eds, *Scotland and the Wider World: Essays in Honour of Allan I. Macinnes* (Woodbridge, 2022), 34–48; eadem, '"O Wretched King!": Ireland, Denmark-Norway, and Kingship in the Reign of James V', in Steven J. Reid, ed., *Rethinking the Renaissance and Reformation in Scotland: Essays in Honour of Roger A. Mason* (Woodbridge, 2024), 118–39.

[8] Robert Armstrong and Tadhg Ó hAnnracháin, eds, *Insular Christianity: Alternative Models of the Church in Britain and Ireland, c.1570–c.1700* (Manchester, 2013); Tadhg Ó hAnnracháin and Robert Armstrong, eds, *Christianities in the Early Modern Celtic World*

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Scholarly treatment of religion and religious change in individual islands and island groups has been productive, but patchy. The Western Isles of Scotland are best served, usually in the context of Gaelic culture's broader confrontation with the priorities of the Stewart monarchy.[9] For the Channel Islands, there are fine individual studies of the Reformation and its aftermath in Guernsey and Jersey.[10] An unpublished Edinburgh thesis of 1940 remains the fullest account of religious change in Shetland, though a pair of illuminating essays by Charlotte Methuen suggest possibilities for future research. For Orkney, a 1959 article by Gordon Donaldson was long the only significant point of reference, now supplemented, and in part superseded, by my own recent reassessment.[11] A fuller understanding of the Reformation in the Isle of Man awaits a forthcoming study by Tim Grass, some first fruits of which appear in this volume.[12]

(Basingstoke, 2014); Robert Armstrong and Tadhg Ó hAnnracháin, eds, *The English Bible in the Early Modern World* (Leiden, 2018).

[9] See, in particular, Jane Dawson, 'Calvinism and the Gaidhealtachd in Scotland', in Andrew Pettegree, Alastair Duke and Gillian Lewis, eds, *Calvinism in Europe, 1540–1620* (Cambridge, 1994), 231–53; Wilson McLeod, *Divided Gaels: Gaelic Cultural Identities in Ireland and Scotland*, c.*1200*–c.*1650* (Oxford, 2004); Fiona A. Macdonald, *Missions to the Gaels: Reformation and Counter-Reformation in Ulster and the Highlands and Islands of Scotland, 1560–1760* (Edinburgh, 2006); Martin MacGregor, 'Civilising Gaelic Scotland: The Scottish Isles and the Stewart Empire', in Micheál Ó Siochrú and Éamonn Ó Ciadhra, eds, *The Plantation of Ulster: Ideology and Practice* (Manchester, 2012), 33–54; William Ian P. Hazlett, 'Reformation Entry into Gaelic Scotland, 1567–1630', in idem, ed., *A Companion to the Reformation in Scotland*, c.*1525–1638: Frameworks of Change and Development* (Leiden, 2021), 542–77.

[10] Darryl M. Ogier, *Reformation and Society in Guernsey* (Woodbridge, 1996); Helen M. Evans, 'The Religious History of Jersey, 1558–1640' (PhD thesis, University of Cambridge, 2001). See also Tim Thornton, *The Channel Islands, 1370–1640: Between England and Normandy* (Woodbridge, 2012).

[11] Ernest W. Wallis, 'The Church in Shetland During the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries' (PhD thesis, University of Edinburgh, 1940); Charlotte Methuen, 'Orkney, Shetland and the Networks of the Northern Reformation', *Nordlit* 43 (2019), 25–53; eadem, '"Islands Not Far from Norway, Denmark and Germany": Shetland, Orkney and the Spread of the Reformation in the North', in James Kelly, Henning Laugerud and Salvador Ryan, eds, *Northern European Reformations: Transnational Perspectives* (London, 2020), 191–211; Gordon Donaldson, 'Bishop Adam Bothwell and the Reformation in Orkney', *RSCHS* 13 (1959), 85–100; Peter Marshall, 'Reformation on Scotland's Northern Frontier: The Orkney Islands, 1560–*c.*1700', in Kelly, Laugerud and Ryan, eds, *Northern European Reformations*, 21–48; idem, *Storm's Edge: Life, Death and Magic in the Islands of Orkney* (London, 2024), 101–34.

[12] Tim Grass, 'Language and the Manx Reformation, 1570–1698', in this volume.

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Whether islands, collectively, do in fact represent a useful category for the study of the Reformation is by no means self-evident. The multitudinous islands dotted around the coastline of Great Britain were, and are, extremely diverse. Typologies are only ever crude and inexact, but it is nonetheless possible to discern some broad patterns. A few islands were large, close to the mainland, and relatively well-integrated with it. They included Anglesey and the Isle of Wight, and, in Scotland, Arran and Bute in the Firth of Clyde. The Isle of Man was comparable to Arran and Anglesey in size, but further from the mainland, and belongs in a category of its own.

Other islands clustered in archipelagos characterized by institutional and economic co-dependence, and a strong sense of collective identity not incompatible with inter-island rivalry: here we can count Orkney, Shetland, the Channel Islands, and the Isles of Scilly. The hundred and fifty-odd islands of the Hebrides, strung out along 200 miles of Scotland's ragged west coast from the southern point of Islay to the Butt of Lewis in the north, were scarcely an archipelago in the same sense, though there was a powerful cultural affinity – damaged but not destroyed by the Reformation – among the isles forming the arc of the Outer Hebrides, sometimes collectively referred to as *An t-Eilean Fada*, the Long Island.

Finally, there was a scattering of small, isolated island communities, with populations sometimes only in double-digits, such as Lundy in the mouth of the Bristol Channel, or the tiny Atlantic grouping fifty miles west of Harris, known, thanks to a cartographic error, as St Kilda, but more properly Hiort or Hirta.[13] More isolated still was the tiny community on North Rona, north-east of Lewis, whose entire population starved to death in the mid-1680s after rats from a shipwreck decimated its supplies of food.[14] The religious culture of these micro-communities represents a fascinating study in itself. Lundy lay outside formal diocesan structures, and had no resident priest before or after the Reformation. Prior to the beginning of the eighteenth century, the same was true of St Kilda. The clergyman Donald Munro, who travelled through the Hebrides in 1549, reported that a chaplain came out once a year with the landlord's steward, and at other times the islanders 'baptise ther barnes themselves'. There was an ancient chapel

[13] Roger Hutchison, *St Kilda: A People's History* (Edinburgh, 2014), 39–41.
[14] Martin Martin, *A Description of the Western Isles of Scotland* (London, 1703), 25.

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on North Rona, but the inhabitants were, Munro claimed, 'simple people scant of any religion'.[15]

Perhaps islands were simply not very socially, politically or religiously significant. That was the impression received by the government of Venice from a long 'relation of England' despatched in 1622 by its ambassador in London, Girolamo Lando. He reported that the ruler of the kingdoms of England and Scotland, cut off from mainland Europe, 'has hardly any adjacent members except islands'. Of these, the Isle of Wight lay in an important situation, while Anglesey, separated by a small 'river', was considered part of the mainland. The other English islands were 'rather nests for birds than habitations for men'. 'Two little islands', Jersey and Guernsey, with 'scanty inhabitants', were all that remained from the patrimony of William the Conqueror. Lando ignored the Isle of Man. As for Scotland, the Hebrides and Orkneys were 'stones rather than rocks, and rocks rather than islands'. Their

> handful of people … scarcely know of God, are rarely visited and resemble beasts more than men. They do not know the meaning of obedience to the king, who has not troubled to put restraint upon them … and one may call them simply the hairs on the body of that kingdom.[16]

It is an arresting metaphor, appropriate in ways its author did not perhaps intend. Hair is both extraneous and integral to the body, seemingly dispensable, but performing crucial physiological functions. It also matters to external appearance and reputation, and, to varying degrees, demands to be tamed and controlled.

Scotland, unlike England, had an established concept of 'the isles', a geographical and cultural zone far from the usual seat of government in Edinburgh. A perception that the islands were not really part of the kingdom was widespread in late medieval and early modern Scotland.

[15] Cressy, *England's Islands*, 28; Donald Munro, 'A Description of the Western Iles of Scotland', in Arthur Mitchell and James Toshach Clark, eds, *Geographical Collections Relating to Scotland Made by Walter Macfarlane*, 3 vols (Edinburgh, 1906–8), 3: 291, 201. Munro's account provided the basis for George Buchanan's treatment of the Western Isles in his influential *Rerum Scoticarum Historia* of 1582: Roger A. Mason, 'From Buchanan to Blaeu: The Politics of Scottish Chorography, 1582–1654', in idem and Caroline Erskine, eds, *George Buchanan: Political Thought in Early Modern Britain and Europe* (London, 2012), 13–47, at 26–8.

[16] Allen B. Hinds, ed., *Calendar of State Papers Relating to English Affairs in the Archives of Venice*, 17: *1621–1623* (London, 1911), 424 (no. 603).

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Chroniclers regularly referred to both the Western Isles and Orkney as places *beyond* Scotland, an attitude which likewise seemed to permeate the workings of government. A servant of James IV, travelling to Orkney in 1500, carried a warrant offering him protection 'from the day of the passing of him forth of our realm … until his return'. At a time of famine in 1555, the Scottish parliament banned export of foodstuffs 'forth of this realm', but made exception for trade with the Western Isles.[17]

Parallel assumptions inform a key text of Protestant national identity, John Speed's famous atlas of 1612. The work carries an instructive title: *The Theatre of the Empire of Great Britaine, presenting an Exact Geography of the Kingdomes of England, Scotland, Ireland, and the Iles Adioyning*. Speed was scrupulous in his coverage of the latter, providing maps and corresponding accounts of Jersey, Guernsey, the Isle of Wight, Anglesey, and the Isle of Man. There was commentary on the Northern and Western Isles in his short section on Scotland, though a description of Shetland as 'ever covered with ice and snow' suggests a limited awareness of actual conditions there.

If the islands were not fully part of the kingdoms, Speed was nonetheless eager to fold them into Jacobean imperial dominion. Orkney, Shetland and the Hebrides were places 'yielding both beauty and subjection to this Scottish kingdome'. Guernsey and Jersey were 'compassed … with the British Sea', along with 'all other ilands and ilets, which doe scatteredly environ it, and shelter themselves (as it were) under the shadow of great Albion'.[18] Speed's work was published as James VI and I was forcefully asserting the principle of *mare clausum*, sole imperium over the 'closed' territorial waters encompassing his kingdom. The islands enlarged but also created diplomatic complications for this claim to exclusive maritime jurisdiction, and, in practice, Speed and nearly all other cartographers restricted the potentially capacious descriptor 'British Sea' to what we now call the English Channel.[19] The title given to Speed's most iconic map, 'The British Islands, proposed in one view', was also something of a misnomer.

[17] Julian Goodare, *The Government of Scotland 1560—1625* (Oxford, 2004), 235–6; Marshall, *Storm's Edge*, 12; Thomas Thomson and Cosmo Innes, eds, *Acts of the Parliament of Scotland*, 12 vols (Edinburgh, 1814–75), 2: 495.

[18] John Speed, *The Theatre of the Empire of Great Britaine, presenting an Exact Geography of the Kingdomes of England, Scotland, Ireland, and the Iles Adioyning* (London, 1612), 1, 91, 94, 125, 132.

[19] David Armitage, *The Ideological Origins of the British Empire* (Cambridge, 2000), 100–24; Carl Moreland and David Bannister, *Antique Maps* (Oxford, 1986), 213–23.

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Shetland does not appear at all, and Orkney is dislocated into a marginal box. Nor could Speed find room for Guernsey and Jersey, though they do appear skirting the rim of a map of the Commonwealth of England, engraved by Thomas Simon for a new great seal in 1648.[20]

In such representations, the marginality of islands is self-evident; they are positioned and defined by a peripheral relationship to mainlands. Such 'peripherality' is, however, constructed rather than natural, a reflection of the ideological functions of cartography. The Channel Islands indeed lie at the edge of 'the British Sea', but they are located just off the coast of Normandy, and Jersey is as close to Paris as to London. A map of the North Atlantic world deciding to place Orkney and Shetland at its centre would look far different.[21] Supposedly marginal, fringe locations are revealed as points of connection and confluence, roughly equidistant between Bergen and Edinburgh, Oslo and Dublin, and Reykjavik and London. The Isle of Man is often portrayed as a backwater, but similar cartographic reorientation reveals it to be the true geographical centre of Britain, ringed by the four nations of Scotland, England, Wales and Ireland. The Western Isles' proximity to Ireland, moreover, was a crucial cultural, economic and military fact of the era.

Peripheries, then, can turn out to be frontiers, zones of encounter rather than lonely termini. It is tempting for historians to follow the lead of some contemporary reformers, and regard island communities as 'dark corners' of the land. John Foxe, for example, portrayed Guernsey as 'an obscure Ieland … in such an out-corner of the realme'.[22] But metaphors of angular enclosure are ill-chosen. Islands, particularly in an age when sea travel was generally easier than overland alternatives, were often remarkably open and accessible places.[23] This made them more

[20] Alfred Benjamin Wyon and Allan Wyon, *The Great Seals of England: From the Earliest Period to the Present Time* (London, 1887), 90–4 (plates 30–1).

[21] See the Kirkwall-centred map in Ronald Miller, *Orkney* (London, 1976), 10.

[22] John Foxe, *Actes and Monuments* (London, 1583), book 11, p. 1971. Compare Christopher Hill, 'Puritans and "The Dark Corners of the Land"', *TRHS* 13 (1963), 77–102. James Sharpe, 'Witchcraft in the Early Modern Isle of Man', *Cultural and Social History* 4 (2007), 11–28, at 22, contends 'there can be little doubt that the island was one of the "dark corners" of Europe'.

[23] For some conceptual and comparative perspectives on 'islandness', see, among a now voluminous body of literature, Pete Hay, 'A Phenomenology of Islands', *Island Studies Journal* 1 (2006), 19–42; Louis Sicking, 'The Dichotomy of Insularity: Islands between Isolation and Connectivity in Medieval and Early Modern Europe, and Beyond', *International Journal of Maritime History* 26 (2014), 494–511; Douglas Hamilton and John

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significant, and more of a focus of anxiety, than Ambassador Lando or Cartographer Speed seemed willing to recognize.

Britain's islands were individually unique, and typologically diverse, but some common features conditioned their reception and negotiation of religious change. One was a tendency to manifest jurisdictional anomalies. Starting in the south, Jersey and Guernsey were possessions of the English Crown but not technically part of the kingdom of England. The Channel Islands were a remnant of the lost duchy of Normandy, controlled by royal governors, co-operating, or not, with local bailiffs and jurats, who administered in their courts a legal system derived from the customary law of Normandy.

Ecclesiastically, the islands belonged to the diocese of Coutances, an arrangement out of step with geopolitical realities at the end of the fifteenth century. Pope Alexander VI issued a bull in 1496 transferring them to the diocese of Salisbury, and a second in 1499 to Winchester. But curial forgetfulness and practicalities on the ground meant the instruction was effectively ignored, and bishops of Coutances carried on with routine administrative business. Remarkably, the break with Rome did not foreclose the arrangement. In 1542, Henry VIII sought to inhibit the bishop of Coutances from exercising papal jurisdiction, but was willing enough for him to exercise it in the king's name. Even in Edward VI's reign, the governor of Jersey, Sir Hugh Paulet, received orders 'to use the sayd bisshop as our Dyocesyan in all things not repugnante or contrary to the lawes and ordonnances of the realm.' Not until 1569 were the islands unambiguously brought within Winchester's ambit.[24]

Ecclesio-politics in the Isle of Man were no less convoluted. In the High Middle Ages, Man was a Hiberno-Norse territory nominally subject to the king of Norway, though, in reality, an independent lordship ruled by self-styled kings. In 1266, as a result of the Treaty of Perth, it came, along with the Hebrides, into the possession of the king of Scots. In the fourteenth century, the island was conquered by English adventurers, and at the start of the fifteenth, Henry IV bestowed

McAleer, eds, *Islands and the British Empire in The Age of Sail* (Oxford, 2021); Aideen Foley et al., 'Understanding "Islandness"', *Annals of the American Association of Geographers* 113 (2023), 1800–17.

[24] Evans, 'Religious History of Jersey', 3–5, 30; Thornton, *Channel Islands*, 75, 79. They remained under the jurisdiction of Winchester until November 2022 when they were returned to the diocese of Salisbury.

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it on Sir John Stanley, whose grandson became earl of Derby. The Stanleys at first called themselves kings, but in 1504 settled for the more modest title of 'Lords of Man'. The island's own laws were (and are) promulgated by its parliament, the Tynwald.[25]

Church jurisdiction followed a similarly corkscrew course. Man belonged to the straggling medieval diocese of the *Suðreyjar*, the southern isles, later to be quaintly anglicized, via Latin, as 'Sodor'. The bishopric was in the mid-twelfth century confirmed by the papacy as part of the province of Nidaros (that is, Trondheim), though rival claims were advanced by archbishops of York. The church in Man became detached from the rest of the isles in the decades after English conquest, though its relationship to English episcopal structures was not fully clarified until 1542, when an act of the English parliament annexed it to the province of York.[26] For practical purposes, however, the Manx church remained largely autonomous; or rather, it fell under the authority of the Stanleys, who nominated episcopal candidates to the bishopric, and exercised their own de facto royal supremacy. The island's religious houses – a Franciscan friary, and Cistercian monastery and nunnery – were dissolved in 1540, but reform was otherwise slow to take root, despite the Protestant sympathies of the fourth earl of Derby, lord of Man from 1572 to 1593. The island lay outside the scope of the York Ecclesiastical Commission, and only in 1594 were the Elizabethan Injunctions imposed, the Tynwald ordering inquiry into superstitious practices at funerals, and absences from divine service.[27]

Further north, the threads of political and ecclesiastical power were equally tangled. Annexation of the Hebrides in 1266 did not lead to their integration into the Scottish state, but to the consolidation of a semi-independent lordship of the Isles, in the hands of Clan Donald. In 1493, James IV suppressed the lordship, but the result was a fragmentation of authority among successor MacDonalds and other

[25] Robert H. Kinvig, *The Isle of Man: A Social, Cultural and Political History* (Liverpool, 1975), 86–97; Tim Thornton, 'Scotland and the Isle of Man, *c.*1400–1625: Noble Power and Royal Presumption in the Northern Irish Sea Province', *ScHR* 77 (1998), 1–30.

[26] Alex Woolf, 'The Diocese of the Sudreyar', in Steinar Imsen, ed., *Ecclesia Nidrosiensis 1153–1537* (Trondheim, 2003), 171–81; Anne Ashley, 'The Spiritual Courts of the Isle of Man, especially in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries', *EHR* 72 (1957), 31–59, at 35–6.

[27] Tim Grass, 'The Reformation and the Isle of Man', *Isle of Man Studies* 17 (2021), 89–93; and compare 'Language and the Manx Reformation'. See also Ashley, 'Spiritual Courts', 36; William Sacheverell, *An Account of the Isle of Man*, ed. Joseph G. Cumming (Douglas, 1859), 182.

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clan chiefs, rather than any tangible extension of royal authority. Scholars are divided on the extent to which in the sixteenth century a culturally unified and politically potent Gaeldom straddled the Irish Sea. There were certainly strong ties of kinship between the Western Isles and Ulster, along with regular political intrigues and much movement of mercenary Gallowglasses and Redshanks. Writing in the late 1590s, an English officer complained of how 'the Irish and the Scottish Ilanders are sprong out of one nation and people, ther bringing up hath benne alike, ther language one, and ther alyance and blood is dayly renued by matches and mariages'.[28] The portion of the diocese of the Isles severed from Man, with an episcopal seat now at Snizeort in northern Skye, continued under Nidaros's nominal authority until 1472, when the papacy transferred it to St Andrews, newly elevated to the status of archbishopric. We know little about Hebridean religious culture on the eve of the Reformation, but the diocese was certainly impoverished, its revenues syphoned into the hands of local elites.[29]

The diocese of Orkney, of which Shetland constituted an archdeaconry, was likewise transferred from Trondheim to St Andrews in 1472. Orkney's earlier position in the province of Nidaros had been more secure than that of the southern isles; indeed, it occupied a geographically central location within the archdiocese. Four of the ten bishops under the jurisdiction of Nidaros were in Norway, but from Orkney the province extended north-west to the diocese of the Faroes, to the two bishoprics in Iceland, and to Latin Christianity's westernmost outpost: the cathedral at Garðar on the southern tip of Greenland.[30] The Northern Isles remained Norwegian after the Treaty of Perth, though were increasingly open to Scottish immigration and influence. They came under Danish control with the Union of Kalmar

[28] For a broadly unitary 'Gaelic world', see Steven G. Ellis, *Ireland in the Age of the Tudors, 1447–1603*, 2nd edn (London, 2014; first publ. 1998). For a critique, see McLeod, *Divided Gaels.* Hiram Morgan, ed., 'A Booke of Questions and Answars Concerning the Warrs or Rebellions of the Kingdome of Irelande', *Analecta Hibernica* 36 (1995), 79–132, at 125.

[29] See Iain G. MacDonald, 'The Church in Gaelic Scotland before the Reformation', and Martin MacGregor, 'Gaelic Christianity? The Church in the Western Highlands and Islands of Scotland before and after the Reformation', in Ó hAnnracháin and Armstrong, eds, *Celtic World*, 17–28 and 55–70, respectively.

[30] Barbara E. Crawford, 'The Bishopric of Orkney', in Imsen, ed., *Ecclesia Nidrosiensis*, 143–58.

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(1397), which conjoined the Norwegian and Danish Crowns. In 1468, Orkney, and in 1469, Shetland, were pledged to Scotland, after Christian I failed to come up with a cash dowry for the marriage of his daughter Margaret to James III of Scotland. Considerable controversy and uncertainty, then and subsequently, surrounded this development. James III acted swiftly to strengthen his control, in 1472 annexing the Orkney earldom to the Crown. But Christian I's successors insisted it was a temporary mortgaging, and repeatedly swore to recover the islands. In part, this was an effort to appease the Norwegian nobility, not consulted about the original alienation. But successive Danish sovereigns were, periodically at least, serious about reclaiming Orkney and Shetland, proffering the redemption money on various occasions through to 1667.[31]

Like Man and the Channel Islands, Orkney and Shetland exhibited hybrid models of law and governance. Scottish rule at first involved little more than a renaming of existing courts and officials, and the islands' own legal system, based on earlier Norwegian codes, operated alongside Scottish law until 1611. The church in Orkney, and to a lesser extent Shetland, was from the fourteenth century increasingly 'Scotticized'; indeed, Scottish-born bishops were useful diplomatic conduits between the courts in Copenhagen and Edinburgh.[32] The transfer to St Andrews was, however, resented in Norway, and apparently forgotten about in Rome. In 1520, Leo X ordered the bishop of Orkney to send to Trondheim money raised in the islands by his notorious plenary indulgence. Nidaros's archbishop in the 1520s, Olaf Engelbrektsson, commissioned a search of the curial archives for documents relating to the transfer, with a view to overturning it. He also sponsored a provocative ecclesiastical visitation of Shetland by a newly consecrated bishop of Skálholt in Iceland. Engelbrektsson was tenacious, but his campaign to recover the lost diocese

[31] Barbara E. Crawford, 'The Pawning of Orkney and Shetland: A Reconsideration of the Events of 1460-1469', *ScHR* 48 (1969), 35–53; Brian Smith, 'When Did Orkney and Shetland Become Part of Scotland? A Contribution to the Debate', *New Orkney Antiquarian Journal* 5 (2010), 1–18; Ian Peter Grohse, 'The Lost Cause: Kings, the Council, and the Question of Orkney and Shetland, 1468–1536', *Scandinavian Journal of History* 45 (2020), 286–308.

[32] Gordon Donaldson, 'Problems of Sovereignty and Law in Orkney and Shetland', in David Sellar, ed., *The Stair Society: Miscellany Two* (Edinburgh, 1984), 24–34; Ian Peter Grohse, *Frontiers for Peace in the Medieval North: The Norwegian-Scottish Frontier, c. 1260–1470* (Leiden, 2017), 134–53.

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was derailed by the Danish Reformation, whose imposition in Norway he sought energetically, but unsuccessfully, to impede.[33]

The Scandinavian Reformation ran in parallel to the English one and preceded by a generation Protestantism's political triumph in Scotland. It occasioned the creation of another remarkable map: a *Carta marina et descriptio septentrionalium terrarum* (maritime map and description of the northern lands), the work of an exiled Swedish churchman, Olaus Magnus, later to be appointed by the pope as titular archbishop of Uppsala. Printed in Venice in 1539, the map celebrates the wonders of the Baltic world, as well as exhibiting Swedish patriotism and offering fraternal support for Norwegian freedom from Denmark.[34] Islands are prominent in the *Carta marina*, particularly a majestic Iceland, which dwarfs in scale a shrivelled and cowering Denmark at the bottom of the frame.[35] Orkney and Shetland feature, not as marginal locations, but as key elements of an extended Scandinavian world, alongside the Faroes and the imagined island of Tile or Thule. Defiantly emblazoned with the lion of Norway, Orkney is of equivalent size to the whole of mainland Scotland. In a set of accompanying notes, Magnus explained that in Orkney 'they speak Norwegian, as a token that they belong to that kingdom, as do many other surrounding islands'.[36]

Language, and the challenges of effecting or resisting religious reform in non-anglophone or bilingual societies, has long been on the radar of historians of the British and Irish Reformations.[37] An island perspective underlines the importance of this issue, as well as the need to avoid blanket conclusions concerning it. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, at least nine indigenous languages were spoken in British island communities. The people of the Channel Islands used related but distinct vernaculars derived from Norman-French:

[33] Marshall, *Storm's Edge*, 71–2; Henning Laugerud, *Reformasjon uten folk: det katolske Norge i før- og etterrefomatorisk tid* (Oslo, 2018), 89–133.
[34] Kurt Johannesson, *The Renaissance of the Goths in Sixteenth-Century Sweden*, transl. James Larson (Berkeley, CA, 1991), 175–83.
[35] Olaus Magnus, *Carta marina et descriptio septentrionalium terrarum* (1539), online at: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Carta_Marina.jpeg>, accessed 22 February 2024.
[36] Olaus Magnus, *Ain kurze Auslegung und Verklerung der neuuen Mappen von den alten Goettenreich und andern Nordlenden* (Venice, 1539), A4^{v}. For further discussion of the *Carta marina* in its contemporary political and diplomatic context, see Alison Cathcart, '"O Wretched King!"', 132–7.
[37] See, in particular, Felicity Heal, 'Mediating the Word: Language and Dialects in the British and Irish Reformations', *JEH* 56 (2005), 261–86.

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Jèrriais in Jersey and Guernésiais in Guernsey. The population of Scilly spoke Cornish. The Isle of Wight was anglophone and Anglesey, Ynys Môn, was Welsh-speaking. In the Isle of Man, the gentry used English, but many common people only understood Manx Gaelic. Some Scots was spoken in the Western Isles, but Gaelic was the dominant vernacular throughout the Hebrides and West Highland littoral. Olaus Magnus was partially correct to claim that Orcadians spoke Norwegian. Orkney and Shetland's medieval vernacular was Norn, a variant of old Norse, derived from the west Norwegian dialects of early Viking settlers. But in Orkney, and to a lesser extent Shetland, Norn was increasingly challenged by Scots, which, even before 1468, became the medium of earldom and episcopal administration, and predominant in the trading port of Kirkwall.[38]

The Reformations arrived in Britain at a moment when multiple native languages were at various stages of historical development, but when a privileged vernacular – English for England and Wales; Scots for Scotland – had already become associated with political loyalty and imperatives of state-formation. Different cultural meanings and value were nonetheless ascribed to insular languages. Prior to the reign of Charles I, for example, there does not seem to have been much hostility on the part of English governors to the French vernaculars of the Channel Islands.[39] It was otherwise in Scotland, where 'the isles' were firmly identified as the heartland of Gaelic language and culture, and of Catholic resistance to promulgation of the 'Word'. Here, a rhetoric of disparagement developed in parallel with the Reformation and with Anglo-Scottish efforts to 'civilize' Ireland.[40] Over the course of the sixteenth century, Scottish Gaelic was increasingly referred to by Lowlanders as 'Erse' (Irish), a means of denigrating the language and portraying its speakers as alien.[41] In 1529, James V was happy to tell the pope how 'the Isles formed the greatest part of the Scottish kingdom at

[38] Ragnhild Ljosland, 'The Establishment of the Scots Language in Orkney', *New Orkney Antiquarian Journal* 6 (2012), 65–80.
[39] Evans, 'Religious History of Jersey', 139–40; Thornton, *Channel Islands*, 147
[40] Jane H. Ohlmeyer, '"Civilizing of those Rude Partes": Colonization within Britain and Ireland, 1580s–1640s', in Nicholas Canny, ed., *The Oxford History of the British Empire*, 1: *British Overseas Enterprise to the Close of the Seventeenth Century* (Oxford, 1998), 124–45; Allan I. Macinnes, 'Making the Plantations British, 1603–1638: A Problematic Historiography', in Steven G. Ellis and Raingard Eßer, eds, *Frontiers and the Writing of History, 1500–1850* (Hanover-Laatzen, 2006), 95–125.
[41] Colin Kidd, *British Identities Before Nationalism: Ethnicity and Nationhood in the Atlantic World, 1600–1800* (Cambridge, 1999), 125–7.

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the first: they received the faith with alacrity, and have maintained it consistently.'[42] Seventy years later, James VI, in his *Basilikon Doron*, observed how Highland Gaelic-speakers comprised 'two sorts of people; the one, that dwelleth in our maine land, that are barbarous and yet mixed with some shewe of civilitie; the other, that dwelleth in the Iles and are alluterlie barbares, without any sorte or shewe of civilitie.'[43] A few years later, James's secretary of state, Sir Alexander Hay, wrote in reference to the Hebrides about 'these unhallowed people with that unchristiane language'.[44]

The introduction, implementation and routinization of Protestant religion in the various islands of Britain involved complex calibrations between the language of the people, the language of the clergy, and the language of liturgy and other textual instruments. Historians have largely moved away from a paradigm privileging the translation of Scripture into the vernacular above all else, for all that this might seem to account for the Reformation's comparative success in Wales and near-total failure in Ireland. More important was the ability of reforming clergy to ingratiate themselves with local elites, and to craft a compelling, or at least socially useful, message in a language that ordinary people could understand.[45] The Isle of Man was unusual among Britain's larger island communities in the early modern period in sustaining an almost entirely indigenous parish ministry. In the early seventeenth century, an outsider, the Welsh-born bishop of Sodor and Man, John Phillips, translated the Book of Common Prayer into Manx, but it was never printed, and Manx clergy reportedly found Phillips's Welsh-based orthography effectively incomprehensible. Instead, ministers in Man's seventeen parishes used the English Prayer Book, but in a linguistically amphibian manner translated sections off-the-cuff to their congregations.[46] The effectiveness of this as an evangelization method must be considered moot.

In the Channel Islands, by contrast, parishioners had access to a government-sponsored French translation of the 1552 Prayer Book. After the middle of the sixteenth century, parish clergymen in both

[42] MacGregor, 'Gaelic Christianity?', 68.
[43] James VI, *Basilikon Doron* (Edinburgh, 1599), 42.
[44] James R. N. MacPhail, ed., *Highland Papers*, 4 vols (Edinburgh, 1914–34), 3: 302.
[45] On this theme, see Dawson, 'Calvinism in the Gaidhealtachd', 233–9; Donald Meek, 'The Reformation and Gaelic Culture', in James Kirk, ed., *The Church in the Highlands* (Edinburgh, 1998), 37–62.
[46] See Grass, 'Language and the Manx Reformation'.

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Jersey and Guernsey were increasingly non-indigenous, but did not speak an entirely different language, as, from the early 1560s, there was an influx of refugee Huguenot clergy from Normandy. In 1563, churches in the French Reformed manner, with consistories, were established at Saint Helier in Jersey and Saint Peter Port in Guernsey, and thence rolled out to other parishes. The situation was formalized in 1576 with the drawing up of a church order for the two islands, the *discipline ecclésiastique*, and the establishment of two synods meeting together in an inter-island colloquy. In effect, a 'Stranger church', like the ones catering to Protestant refugees in London, was contracted to supply religious services and theological instruction to the population as a whole.[47]

In this context, the lack of a French translation of the 1559 Prayer Book hardly mattered. The Channel Islands represented a remarkable exception to the usual Elizabethan insistence on religious uniformity, one that two successive conformist bishops of Winchester, John Watson and Thomas Cooper, were required to stomach. It reflected an official willingness to accept the sometimes anomalous status of islands, linked to concerns over national security and a desire to promote the Protestant cause in France. The islands could also serve as a kind of homeland safety-valve: in 1595, the disruptive puritans Thomas Cartwright and Edmund Snape were permitted to go into exile in Guernsey and Jersey, and assume pastoral positions there.[48]

At the other end of Britain, too, island parishes were served by immigrant clergy. Even before the Reformation, priests in Orkney were largely, though not entirely, recruited from mainland Scotland, but the pattern became more marked in both Orkney and Shetland after *c.*1600. The fate of Norn has not to date registered much in the scholarship on bilingual societies and the Reformation, and the precise relationship is hard to fathom. Norn was probably used or understood by a majority of Orcadians in 1600, but by the end of the century was spoken only in pockets, and by 1750 was effectively extinct. In Shetland, the timescale of decline lagged a couple of generations behind.[49] For neither of the northern archipelagos is there evidence of

[47] Evans, 'Religious History of Jersey', 27–8, 37; Ogier, *Reformation and Society*, 94–112.
[48] Peter Heylyn, *A Full Relation of Two Journeys, the One into the Main-land of France, the Other into some of the Adjacent Ilands* (London, 1656), 326, 337.
[49] Of the twenty-five ministers appointed to Orkney parishes in 1600–40, twenty-two were born elsewhere, as were at least thirteen of eighteen in Shetland: Hew Scott, ed., *Fasti Ecclesiae Scoticanae … 7: Synods of Ross, Sutherland and Caithness, Glenelg, Orkney and of Shetland*

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Protestant attempts to evangelize in Norn, or use it in church services. The Reformation aligned itself with the socially ascendant language and accelerated the demise of the other. In the early 1640s, one minister commented patronisingly on how rural Orcadians 'either express, or try to express, the humanity and civility which they have taken from Scots who live among them'. However, there are reasons to suspect that a legacy of Norn seeped into layers of folklore and custom, to whose meanings the immigrant ministers had little or no access.[50]

In the Hebrides, nervousness about the incivility of Gaelic gave way to a pragmatic recognition on the part of the Kirk that ministers needed to be competent in the language if they were to stand any chance of making converts among often monoglot islanders. We know little about conditions on the ground in the decades following the Reformation parliament of 1560. It seems clear that in the diocese of the Isles the institutional structure of the old church collapsed fairly quickly, though there is debate among scholars as to whether this left a vacuum the Reformed Kirk failed to fill for a generation and more, or whether substantial foundations were laid, particularly by co-opting the talents of the Gaelic 'learned orders', families of poets and genealogists with established traditions of clerical service.[51]

No full translation of the Bible into Scots Gaelic appeared before the beginning of the nineteenth century, making the Highlands and Western Isles a case study in Calvinism's ability to proceed through oral forms of communication. The first Gaelic printed book, however, dates to 1567, the same year William Salesbury published his version of the New Testament in Welsh. John Carswell, a clerical convert who enjoyed the patronage of Archibald Campbell, fifth earl of Argyll, produced the *Foirm na n-Urrnuidheadh*, a translation of the Book of Common Order, along with parts of Calvin's Little Catechism and a variety of prayers. As superintendent of Argyll, and from 1565 bishop of the Isles, Carswell made strenuous efforts to promote the Reformation in his apparently unpromising territory.[52] Among the prayers

(Edinburgh, 1928), 210–78; Michael P. Barnes, *The Norn Language of Orkney and Shetland* (Lerwick, 1998), 21–8.

[50] Marshall, *Storm's Edge*, 179–80 (quotation at 179), 193–4, 198–9, 355–414.

[51] McLeod, *Divided Gaels*, 196–7; Macdonald, *Missions to the Gaels*, 11–21; Jane Dawson, *Scotland Reformed 1488–1587* (Edinburgh, 2007), 228–9.

[52] Tadhg Ó hAnnracháin, 'Introduction: Religious Acculturation and Affiliation in Early Modern Gaelic Scotland, Gaelic Ireland, Wales and Cornwall', in idem and Armstrong, eds, *Celtic World*, 1–13, at 5–6.

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Carswell appended to the work was a form of blessing for a ship, for captain and crew to recite together before putting to sea. There is evidence of the prayer being used in the isles throughout the seventeenth century,[53] although, to Calvinists elsewhere, this manner of petitionary blessing probably seemed superstitious. Certainly, in 1602 the Channel Islands Colloquy denounced the 'detestable practice' of conducting quasi-baptismal ceremonies for boats.[54]

If islands complicate the relationship between Reformation and language, they do the same for policies of church governance. James VI and I's eagerness to bring greater ecclesiastical uniformity to his kingdoms had a significant island dimension. Orkney, for example, became a test-case for efforts to strengthen the place of episcopacy in the Kirk of Scotland. In 1605, after a lapse of episcopal oversight for a quarter century and more, James appointed as bishop of Orkney an able and ambitious royal chaplain, James Law, who shared the king's Erastian instincts in matters of ecclesiastical polity. Law travelled north in 1611 to impose religious and political order in the islands after the arrest and imprisonment of the unreliable regional ruler, Earl Patrick Stewart. The Norse law of Orkney and Shetland was abolished, and all ministers were reappointed to their benefices by the bishop. An unsuccessful rebellion led by Earl Patrick's illegitimate son Robert in 1614 provided an occasion for the imposition of still firmer episcopal control. Shortly afterwards, Law was transferred to the archbishopric of Glasgow, where, in the words of the Lord Advocate, there would be further opportunities to 'reduce the Church government to that happy estate which his Majesty has long wished'.[55]

At the same time, royal and privy council attention was increasingly focused on the Western Isles, not least because the political and religious situation there was seen to be destabilizing government authority in Ireland at the time of the Nine Years War (1593–1603). In 1607, the privy council authorized the earl of Argyll to take

[53] Thomas McLauchlan, ed., *The Book of Common Order Commonly Called John Knox's Liturgy. Translated into Gaelic anno domini 1567, by Mr. John Carswell, Bishop of the Isles* (Edinburgh, 1873), 240; 'A Collection of Highland Rites and Customs', in Michael Hunter, ed., *The Occult Laboratory: Magic, Science and Second Sight in Late Seventeenth-Century Scotland* (Woodbridge, 2001), 66; Martin, *A Description of the Western Isles of Scotland*, 127–30.

[54] Evans, 'Religious History of Jersey', 89.

[55] Marshall, *Storm's Edge*, 161, 164–5, 177–8. Adam Bothwell, nominally bishop from 1559 until 1593, had effectively resigned his office in 1568.

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military action against Clan Donald for its long record of abetting rebellion in Ireland. Until there was an 'utter suppressing' and dispossession of the clan, 'uncivilitie and barbarities all continew, nocht only thair bot in the Iles'.[56]

Much controversy surrounds the promulgation of the 1609 Statutes of Iona, when nine Hebridean chiefs were summoned to the ancient seat of Scottish Christianity to be presented with articles by the bishop of Argyll and the Isles, Andrew Knox. The first of these required 'a regular parochial ministry to be established and maintained, with the same discipline as in other parts of the realm'. Other statutes attacked Hebridean customs of hospitality, arms-bearing and military quartering, and ordered every chief owning at least sixty cattle to send his eldest son to school in the Lowlands.[57] Historians disagree over whether the statutes were an attempt to suppress the traditional Gaelic social order, or simply aimed to delegate royal authority to existing social elites. The extent to which they were enforced is also disputed, though they were reiterated by a privy council order of 1616, which also decreed that lairds should not be allowed to inherit land in the isles unless they could speak, read and write English, and thus be 'better preparit to reforme thair countreis and to reduce the same to godlines, obedience, and civilitie'.[58]

A Jacobean policy of pan-British religious order extended to the Channel Islands, heralded by a conciliar letter of 1613 declaring the king's intention to conform the islands to 'uniformity of government in other partes of his domynions', and lauding his success in achieving this in Scotland. Over the following decade, in the face of local opposition, a dean was appointed for Jersey, use of a new French translation of the Prayer Book was enjoined, reformed discipline laid aside, and a set of ecclesiastical canons issued. Despite the apparent heavy hand, the reforms were in some ways cautious and gradualist, however. Initially, only Jersey was targeted; the Presbyterian polity in Guernsey remained intact until Charles I sought to dismantle

[56] Scott R. Spurlock, 'Confessionalization and Clan Cohesion: Ireland's Contribution to Scottish Catholic Renewal in the Seventeenth Century', *RH* 31 (2012), 171–94, at 175.
[57] David Masson, ed., *The Register of the Privy Council of Scotland*, 9: *1610–1613* (Edinburgh, 1889), xxvii–xxviii.
[58] Julian Goodare, 'The Statutes of Iona in Context', *ScHR* 77 (1998), 31–57; Martin MacGregor, 'The Statutes of Iona: Text and Context', *InR* 57 (2006), 111–81; Alison Cathcart, 'The Statutes of Iona: The Archipelagic Context', *JBS* 49 (2010), 4–27; Goodare, *Government of Scotland*, 234–5.

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it. Jacobean Jersey ministers were not required to submit to episcopal ordination, use the surplice, or deliver readings from the Apocrypha. Unlike in Orkney, there was no move to abolish local customary law, and unlike the concurrent policy in the Western Isles, no attempt to promote the status of English at the expense of the local vernacular.[59]

The Channel Islands' proximity to Catholic France was a powerful argument against measures likely to produce instability. All around Britain, in fact, islands were a potential front-line in confrontation with the forces of the Counter-Reformation. In the immediate aftermath of the Armada of 1588, to the intense annoyance of Elizabeth's government, a Spanish privateer, under the protection of Earl Robert Stewart, used Orkney as a base to prey on English shipping.[60] British Catholics themselves regularly identified islands as weak points in the nation's military and spiritual defences. In 1575, the Welsh exile Morris Clynnog sought to persuade Gregory XIII to send an expedition of 10,000 men to Anglesey, and use it as a launch-pad for attacking the mainland. Reports of a Catholic conspiracy to seize the Isle of Man reached the English government in early 1593.[61] In 1591, and again in 1619, William Semphill, a Scots soldier in Habsburg service, sent detailed plans to the Spanish government for seizing the Northern Isles as a prelude to an invasion of Scotland. During the Anglo-Spanish War of Charles I's reign (1625–30), Philip IV dusted off these proposals for serious discussion.[62] Other plans, laid but not hatched, involved the Isles of Scilly. The renegade Englishman Thomas Stukeley proposed an expedition to seize them in 1575, as in 1642 did the Irish Franciscan Hugh Bourke. It would, he wrote to a compatriot in Rome, 'give a startling lesson to the English'.[63]

An actual Catholic presence, in many of the islands, was limited. There was a scattering of recusants in Anglesey and the Isle of Wight, but not markedly more so than in adjacent mainland counties. A stray Lazarist missionary undertook a short visit to Orkney in the 1650s, but

[59] Evans, 'Religious History of Jersey', 131–43; Thornton, *Channel Islands*, 139–42.
[60] Peter D. Anderson, *Robert Stewart, Earl of Orkney, Lord of Shetland, 1533–1593* (Edinburgh, 1982), 122–5.
[61] Glanmor Williams, *Wales and the Reformation* (Cardiff, 1997), 262; Cathcart, 'Island Empire', 40.
[62] Marshall, *Storm's Edge*, 149, 245–6.
[63] Richard Simpson, *The School of Shakespeare*, 2 vols (London, 1878), 1: 75; HMC, *Report on Franciscan Manuscripts Preserved at the Convent, Merchants' Quay, Dublin* (Dublin, 1906), 220.

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none made it to Shetland, and post-Reformation Catholic communities would not take shape in the Northern Isles until well into the nineteenth century. Missionary engagement with the Isle of Man was similarly limited, though there is a revealing comment in a letter from a late-seventeenth-century bishop of Sodor about an islander reported to be in a Jesuit college abroad: 'this person having our language [Manx] is the man I most fear'.[64]

The exception is the sustained missionary campaign in the Western Isles undertaken in the second quarter of the seventeenth century by Irish Franciscans based at Louvain. In the Franciscans' Latin letters to *Propaganda Fide* in Rome, describing efforts in Barra, the Uists, Skye, Jura, Mull and other islands, we possess the record of an entirely non-anglophone campaign of evangelism. Indeed, at one stage, the missionaries, fearful their correspondence might be interrupted, took to writing in Gaelic, and having their letters translated into Latin in Louvain. In 1626, the missionaries established a base at the disused friary at Bonamargy on the coast of Antrim in north-east Ireland. Through the 1630s, Catholics from the Hebrides were reported to be flocking there to receive the sacraments, particularly confirmation. The Catholic bishop of Down and Connor was said to have confirmed 700 Scots on one occasion in 1639.[65] Whether the Franciscan mission to the Western Isles should be regarded as a resounding success or a disappointing failure is a judgement on whether the glass looks half-full or half-empty. The friars themselves produced astonishing accounts of their achievements: thousands of souls gained, in a pattern more redolent of missionary endeavour in the New World than of the piecemeal underground advances in England and Lowland Scotland. The authorities in Rome were sceptical, but the missionaries responded with detailed lists of converts, island by island.[66]

What seems likeliest is that the Franciscans were not so much making Catholics of people who had hitherto been convinced Protestants, as meeting the pressing religious needs of communities starved of regular and reliable pastoral provision of any kind over the preceding two generations. Catholic belief persisted across

[64] Cressy, *England's Islands*, 100–2; Marshall, *Storm's Edge*, 290; Grass, 'Reformation and the Isle of Man', 96.
[65] Cathaldus Giblin, ed., *Irish Franciscan Mission to Scotland 1619–1646: Documents from Roman Archives* (Dublin, 1964), vii–xvi, 198; Macdonald, *Missions to the Gaels*, 55–96; Spurlock, 'Scottish Catholic Renewal', 178–9.
[66] Giblin, ed., *Franciscan Mission*, 129–38.

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swathes of the Western Isles after 1560, but without institutional structures or much, if any, clerical instruction; a leading historian of Scottish Catholicism writes of a 'religious vacuum' in the lands of Clan Donald around the turn of the seventeenth century.[67] In August 1625, on Eigg, where no Catholic priest had visited since about 1556, Fr Cornelius Ward preached and said mass before a large crowd. Afterwards, he was confronted by an eighty-year-old woman who complained it was not like the masses she attended in her youth, when the custom was to give the pax to the people to be kissed. Ward had to explain how the ritual did not pertain to the substance of the mass and could safely be omitted. This little face-off between the catechetical priorities of the Counter-Reformation and the social functions of late medieval Christianity is one the late John Bossy would surely have appreciated.[68]

The Franciscan mission petered out in the late 1640s, chronically underfunded and hampered by lack of understanding of conditions on the ground from the Roman authorities, who expected widely dispersed priests to be able to convene every three days to discuss progress. A recurrent complaint of the missionaries was their lack of 'faculties' to bless chapels and liturgical objects, and, crucially, to issue dispensations for marriages contracted within canonically prohibited degrees.[69] Some places where the missionaries scored considerable successes – Lewis, Skye, Arran, Islay – were to be almost wholly lost to Protestantism in the coming decades. But where the resources of the Scottish Kirk were stretched particularly thin, and where Catholic missionaries operated under the protection of sympathetic MacDonald and MacNeill chiefs, lasting results ensued. The islands of Barra, Eriskay, South Uist and Benbecula are to this day some of the most Catholic parts of the United Kingdom.

To ask, however, whether the Reformation – or the Counter-Reformation – succeeded or failed in Britain's islands may be the

[67] Scott Spurlock, 'The Laity and the Structure of the Catholic Church in Early Modern Scotland', in Armstrong and Ó hAnnracháin, eds, *Insular Christianity*, 231–51, at 246. See also idem, 'Catholicism in Scotland to 1603', in James Kelly and John McCafferty, eds, *The Oxford History of British and Irish Catholicism*, 1: *Endings and New Beginnings, 1530–1640* (Oxford, 2023), 68–88, at 75–6.

[68] Giblin, ed., *Franciscan Mission*, 66. For John Bossy's influential argument about the Catholic Reformation reshaping a predominantly social religious system in doctrinal and hierarchical ways, see his *Christianity in the West, 1400–1700* (Oxford, 1985).

[69] Giblin, ed., *Franciscan Mission*, 24, 35, 57, 92–3, 98, 118–19.

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wrong question. Julian Goodare, in his study of Scottish government under James VI, astutely notes how:

> it is all too easy, immersed in government papers, to adopt the government's own value system … and say: These were the problems facing Scotland. We ought rather to say: These were the problems facing Scotland's rulers. Many histories … have assumed that the problem of early modern Scotland was 'lawlessness', 'disorder', 'lack of effective control', or some such phrase. James VI and his councillors thought they had a problem of 'disorder' when people would not obey them; the people themselves may have perceived a problem of unreasonable royal demands and interference.[70]

Islands encapsulate this conundrum in a particularly focused way. They were never 'remote' or 'peripheral' to those who actually lived there, people whose priorities in religion, as in much else, were seldom precisely the same as those of the central authorities, or of the clergymen sent to instruct them. Much more could be said about the challenges the topography and environment of islands routinely presented to externally imposed institutional structures: the difficulties of integrating and aligning them to dioceses, synods, presbyteries, or even parishes. This was not a uniquely insular problem: geographically large parishes, with attendant difficulties for parishioners' access to services, were found in moorland northern England, and across the Scottish Highlands. However, the challenge posed to theology by geography was particularly evident in island settings, and much commented on. In Orkney, Shetland and across much of the Hebrides, for example, there were usually far fewer available ministers than there were inhabited islands or functioning kirks, and in consequence, weekly attendance at divine worship was for many people simply not the norm.[71] The extent to which this was in any way a 'problem' depends on one's perspective.

The voices and beliefs of ordinary islanders are usually silent, muted or refracted in our sources. A fair amount is said about them, second-hand, in a spate of books about islands – topographies, histories and

[70] Goodare, *Government of Scotland*, 17.

[71] Marshall, 'Northern Frontier', 28–30; Wallis, 'Church in Shetland', 55–7, 62–3, 65–7, 77, 174–5. Logistical, transport and attendance problems are recurrent complaints in Duncan C. Mactavish, ed., *Minutes of the Synod of Argyll, 1639–1661*, 2 vols (Edinburgh, 1943–4).

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travelogues – published around the turn of the eighteenth century. They included works by Philippe Falle on Jersey, James Wallace and John Brand on Orkney and Shetland, William Sacheverell and George Waldron on the Isle of Man, and on the Western Isles by the Skye gentleman Martin Martin, who also published an account of a voyage to St Kilda.[72] Often, in these sources, the authorial emphasis is on 'ignorance' and 'superstition'. Yet, in spite of themselves, the accounts paint a picture of remarkably dynamic religious cultures, in which Christianity coexisted with older structures of belief, and outwardly conforming Protestantism with habits of pilgrimage to ancient chapels and wells.

'Remote', 'marginal', 'peripheral', islands were nonetheless continuous objects of interest and attention in the early modern period. As was well understood by numerous writers, from Thomas More to Francis Bacon, William Shakespeare and Daniel Defoe, fictional islands could be invaluable devices for framing and focusing social, moral and political issues.[73] For historians of the Reformation, islands are similarly useful framing instruments. By virtue of their characteristic placement on boundaries, and their tendency to operate as zones of encounter and competition, islands discourage the stubbornly residual tendency to conceptualize the Reformation in exclusively national settings. By virtue of their usually self-evident distinctiveness – from each other, and from an imagined (and often imaginary) mainland norm – islands allow us to observe with enhanced clarity processes that may have been taking place less perceptibly elsewhere. An island perspective necessarily steers us away from diffusionist models of religious change, which prioritize the concerns of central authority. Islands were, at times, conspicuous targets for externally driven campaigns of incorporation and 'civilization', but not infrequently they exposed the limitations of such ambitions, and revealed

[72] Philippe Falle, *An Account of the Isle of Jersey* (London, 1694); James Wallace, *A Description of the Isles of Orkney* (Edinburgh, 1693); John Brand, *A Brief Description of Orkney, Zetland, Pightland-Firth and Caithness* (Edinburgh, 1701); Sacheverell, *Account of the Isle of Man*; George Waldron, 'A Description of the Isle of Man', in *Compleat Works, in Verse and Prose, of George Waldron*, ed. Theodosia Waldron (London, 1731); Martin, *Description of the Western Isles*; idem, *A Late Voyage to St. Kilda, The Remotest of all the Hebrides* (London, 1698).

[73] For an insightful discussion, see Roland Greene, 'Island Logic', in Peter Hulme and William H. Sherman, eds, *The Tempest and its Travels* (London, 2000), 138–45.

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the necessity for reform, if it were to be by any measure successful, to indigenize and evolve.

Islands, then, matter for the history of the Reformation, and they mattered to reformers too. The last words can go to a reformer who was also the first major historian of the British Reformations: the martyrologist John Foxe. In a tract published at the start of 1559, Foxe wrote excitedly from exile in Basel that the light of the gospel had now 'finally reached the furthest bounds of the Ocean, and the Orkneys themselves, so that with the circle of its journey completed so to speak, it has no further spaces to which it might spread'.[74] His claim illustrates nicely how the very marginality of islands could invest them with symbolic and cultural significance: for Foxe, the Reformation's ability to reach Orkney was the final and irrevocable proof of its triumph. The assessment was wide of the mark, but the effusions of an Englishman in Switzerland about a Scottish archipelago claimed by Denmark provide us with a satisfactorily paradoxical conclusion. For historians of the Reformation in Britain, an attentiveness to islands is an antidote to insularity.

[74] John Foxe, *Germaniae ad Angliam de Restituta Evangelii Luce Gratulatio* (Basel, 1559), 46–7.

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