

## REVIEW

**Pasi Ihalainen 2005.** *Protestant Nations Redefined: Changing Perceptions of National Identity in the Rhetoric of the English, Dutch and Swedish Public Churches, 1685-1772.* Leiden: Brill, 686.

### **Martin J. Burke**

With *Protestant Nations Redefined*, Pasi Ihalainen has made a significant contribution to the scholarly literatures on the intersections of religion and politics in early modern Britain, Sweden and the Netherlands, and to the project of a comparative conceptual history of nationalism in eighteenth-century Europe. The main subjects of this thoroughly researched and richly detailed book (of over six hundred pages in length) are changing conceptions of “nation” and “fatherland” from the Revocation of Edict of Nantes to the eve of an age of revolutions; the particular focus is on the genre of state sermons. Ihalainen has examined almost five hundred of these texts, which were delivered by clergymen of the established churches to prominent public bodies and officials at such ritualized events as the Fifth of November (Gun Powder Treason) commemorations in England, prayer days in the United Provinces, and meetings of Sweden’s Riksdag. State sermons subsequently circulated in print among much larger audiences of readers. Ihalainen suggests that the “political theology” contained in and communicated by these highly conventional sources is indicative of the opinions of their Anglican, Reformed and Lutheran authors, and of broader currents in public culture as well. Though such

sermons have drawn the attention of some specialists, particularly in the Netherlands and Sweden, no one else has made these sources the subjects of systematic comparative analyses, nor has applied the methods of conceptual history to them.

In the last years of the seventeenth century clergymen continued to define national communities in confessional terms, as their predecessors had done since the Reformation. In describing the English "nation" and Dutch and Swedish "fatherlands," they employed metaphors drawn from the Hebrew Scriptures and from Protestant Christianity. Ihalainen patiently reconstructs these discourses, and lines out their major themes. Chapters are devoted to evocations of an English, Dutch and Swedish Israel; to the nation/fatherland depicted as a Protestant people/state; to discussions of the relations between the nation and international Protestantism; to the stereotypes of Popery in constructions of national communities; and to the importance of images of a Protestant prince. Ihalainen provides ample examples of similarities and differences in the employment of these themes in state sermons, and situates them in their respective religious, political and social contexts. The dangers of popery, for instance, were far more important topics for English preachers than for their Dutch and Swedish counterparts. Despite the small numbers of English papists, the precedents of anti-popery in both popular and political culture, and the continued presence of Jacobite pretenders in France, served to reinforce prejudices toward and discrimination against them. Construing Roman Catholics as the other, and placing them outside of the bounds of the nation, were common discursive practices. In the Dutch republic, however, with a considerably larger Catholic minority and a robust tradition of toleration, denunciations of popery were more circumspect and less frequent, the Reformed Church's continued opposition to Roman doctrines and devotions notwithstanding. Sweden's Lutheran clerics also criticized the errors of Popery, but in a society from which Catholics had been expelled, anti-Popery was at best a peripheral issue in state sermonizing.

Although confessional descriptions continued to be used well into the eighteenth century, Ihalainen argues that they were gradually supplanted by secular constructions of national identities. By the 1720s, British clergymen were relying more upon examples drawn from antiquity, especially from the Roman republic, and employing what Ihalainen labels as a "language of classical patriotism." By mid-century,

contemporary discourses on commerce and on nature would also feature prominently in state sermons, as would other characteristically Enlightenment themes as toleration. As in his analyses of religiously-based definitions, here too Ihalainen is careful when comparing when, how, and why these changes took place in different national contexts. His discussion of the emergence of a secularized concept of “British liberty,” especially in period of the Seven Years War is insightful. So, too, as are the comparisons of how “liberty” was used in Sweden during the ascendancy of the Estates—now referred to as the “Age of Liberty”—and after Gustavus III’s restoration of monarchical power in 1772. Yet while the trajectory of change in the conceptual content of the state sermons was away from traditional religious references, Ihalainen does not suggest that this entailed a decline of religiosity among preachers or the public in general. No simple secularization model undergirds his analysis. The established churches and their educated ministers continued to be powerful institutions, especially in Sweden, the most homogeneous, and least pluralistic of the three states. Rather, he explains these developments in terms of a “Protestant Enlightenment” in which the clergy endorsed and integrated new learning, and recast their national histories and identities with more positive and inclusive idioms.

How representative state sermons—or any similar body of learned texts—are of larger patterns of change in linguistic practices or political opinions is open to question, of course. Ihalainen offers what amounts to a partial answer in an appendix dealing with the semantic field of “national” in his sample of English sermons preached between 1685 and 1772. There he lists out some one hundred and fifty word combinations such as “national humiliation” and “national prosperity” which he then clusters into ten categories, e.g. “terms of national reformation” and “terms of national commerce.” The name of the author, the day upon which the sermon was preached, the original audience, e.g. the monarch or the House of Commons, and the number(s) of the pages where the word combination appeared in its printed version are also provided. In adjoining columns, he then lists the year of the first appearance of the particular word combination in the *Eighteenth Century Collections Online* database, and the total number of occurrences in *ECCO* between 1701 and 1772. The religiously inflected “national humiliation” was used in ten sermons preached between 1708 and 1768. In *ECCO*, its first use was in 1707, with sev-

enty six instances in total. The secular “national commerce,” however, was included in but two sermons preached in 1744 and 1749. Yet its initial dating in *ECCO* was 1716, the first of one hundred and sixty three uses. Ihalainen is well aware of the limitations faced when working with the *ECCO* database and search engine. Nonetheless, he notes that this comparison of semantic change in the larger universe of sources in *ECCO* and in the sermon sample does provide evidence of adaptations—sometimes rapid and at other times less so—and of some conceptual innovations in an otherwise formal, often formulaic, genre.

Indeed, accounting for innovation in what was a particularly stable set of linguistic performances and practices becomes Ihalainen’s most significant methodological challenge. He readily acknowledges that the priests and ministers who drafted state sermons were not expected to involve themselves with exegetical or ideological novelties. They were chosen to ratify and reinforce the opinions of elites of which they were a part, and to communicate these to the rest of the nation. Their charge was to be conservative, not innovative. Nor did the ceremonies in which the sermons were delivered lend themselves to second order reflections on the meaning of political and theological terminology. The clergymen employed concepts in an apparently consensual, not essentially contested, manner. The changes in meanings and uses that did occur, he maintains, were rarely the result of their conscious decisions to redefine concepts. Instead, they both reflected and contributed to semantic shifts underway in the larger language community. Following along lines sketched out by Reinhart Koselleck and Willibald Steinmetz, Ihalainen argues that at what he calls the “macro-level,” conceptual change was long-term and largely unintended. The engine of that change, it seems, was the emergence of modernity.

Conceptual history as practiced by Ihalainen is more than a Finnish variant of *Begriffsgeschichte*, however. He also insists on the significance of individual preachers in providing new meanings for familiar concepts, and in modifying the terms of political and theological discourse, at what might be labeled as the micro-level. Here the intentions, and the agency, of the speakers/authors are paramount. He refers to the few examples of their deliberate redefinitions of “nation” and “fatherland” as rhetorical redescrptions, in keeping with Quentin Skinner’s influential turn of phrase. But Ihalainen’s reliance upon the

precepts of Cambridge school historians of political thought is more systematic, and satisfying, when he writes about the “languages” of republicanism, commerce, and nature in style first developed by John Pocock. At the micro-level, the causes of conceptual change are to be found within the particular institutional and ideological settings in which the English, Dutch and Swedish clergymen were situated.

What the relations are between the contours of macro and micro-level changes in the concepts of “nation” and “fatherland” in these years is not always apparent. But since this work is written by a historian, not a philosopher, Ihalainen need not bridge the methodological and philosophical distances between Bielefeld *Begriffsgeschichte* and Cambridge contextualism. As a piece of history, this is a meticulously documented and persuasively argued book. Ihalainen engages with an enormous range of recent historiography on politics, religion and society in Britain, the Netherlands and Sweden, and makes a very convincing case for the merits of comparative conceptual analysis.