“IN THE CONFIDENT HOPE OF A MIRACLE”:
THE SPANISH ARMADA AND RELIGIOUS MENTALITIES
IN THE LATE SIXTEENTH CENTURY

BY

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Within national and religious groups, as with individuals, ambivalent
mentalities sometimes exist, which can threaten a sense of wholeness
and lead to shifting alliances—and strange bedfellows—in terms of po-
litical and religious affinities. This can clearly be seen by analyzing the
multifaceted movement known as the Reformation, both in its broad
sweep and in particular aspects such as the Armada campaign. The hi-
s toriography of the Reformation has focused over time on theological,
intellectual, political, and social aspects of this complex phenomenon.
Debates have raged over definitions, periodization, terminology, and a
host of related issues.

Yet, not enough attention has been paid to the reality of the conflict-
ing and often ambivalent loyalties and mentalities of the Reformation
era. A particularly interesting area of inquiry is the Spanish Empire in
Europe—in terms of its constituent members, its allies, and its ene-
mies—especially in the context of the titanic struggle of the Spanish
Armada. More specifically, the strongly Catholic convictions of the Por-
tuguese, Italians, and Flemings who lived under Spanish rule, at times se-
eriously conflicted with desires for greater autonomy or independence.
This ambivalence can be seen in the range of attitudes and perceptions
surrounding the Armada and its aftermath. The Spanish defeat could
have set in motion a vigorous reaction against Spanish hegemony in Eu-
rope. A major reason that this did not happen was the religious factor.
The Armada, although launched for a combination of reasons, sailed un-
der the aura of a religious crusade. The religious mentalities of the pe-
riod come into sharp and fascinating focus when viewed through this
lens. This is true not only of Catholics, both within and outside of the

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Spanish Empire, but of Protestants as well. Not only the "facts" of the Armada campaign, but, perhaps even more so, the rumors, hopes, and fears of Catholic and Protestant Europe concerning its outcome, tell us a great deal about the depth of religious feelings in the late sixteenth century.

For many on the Catholic side, a political desire to see Spain defeated, or at least weakened, was often superseded by a religious desire to see the Catholic cause triumph. Realpolitik often gave way to religious fervor. Among many Protestants, as well, when religious and political goals clashed, religious convictions often took precedence.

By examining a wide range of sources—Catholic, Protestant, and Muslim—we can gain valuable insights into the complexity of cultural, national, and religious motivations in the early modern European and Mediterranean worlds. Thus, for example, why was Catholic support for the Armada generally so strong, support that, outside of Spain at least, was by no means a given, based on a host of political and economic rivalries? And, among the Protestants and Turks, how and why did religious convictions sometimes reinforce and sometimes transcend traditional alliances? This essay suggests that by looking at an "old" event—the Spanish Armada—in a new light, by analyzing not only the realities, but also the rumors and hopes for divine intervention surrounding it, an intriguing portrait emerges of both the complexity and vitality of early modern religious mentalities. In particular, as we shall see, many people in both Catholic and Protestant Europe awaited news of the Armada campaign "in the confident hope of a miracle."1

In the 1580's there were a number of problems facing Philip II of Spain, especially the ongoing revolt in the Netherlands. But the seemingly vast resources at Philip's disposal, together with a conviction that he was God's special agent in the protection and propagation of the Catholic faith, suggested that time and Providence were on his side. At the same time, a principal irritant to Philip and Spain was, increasingly, England, and its pragmatic Protestant ruler, Elizabeth I.

On several fronts, tensions that had been developing between England and Spain were heating up by the 1580's. This included the growing intensity of the persecution of the English Catholic recusants, torn as they were between devotion to their faith and loyalty to their country—a divide that many tried desperately to bridge. On the interna-

tional front, the English "privateers" were growing increasingly bold in their attacks on Spanish shipping in the West Indies and elsewhere, primarily seeking economic gain, but also making inroads for Protestantism. Thus, for example, in an account of the plundering of Santo Domingo by Francis Drake and company in 1586 it was stated: "The enemy brought with them a parson of the Lutheran Faith in order that he should proselytize. When two preaching monks opposed this, they were imprisoned, hanged and died martyrs." Elizabeth's protestations of non-collusion in the wide-ranging raids on Spanish commerce and lands, as well as in the broader political and religious struggles of the Reformation, were ever less believable.3

Moreover, England was giving support to Dom Antonio, the pretender to the crown of Portugal, after Philip had made good his claim to the Portuguese inheritance in 1580. Most troubling of all, however, was the tacit and then overt support from 1585 on that Elizabeth gave to the Dutch Revolt. Any hope for a negotiated settlement founndered not only on the issue of the withdrawal of all foreign troops, but also because of the demand for religious freedom of conscience. According to one report, peace talks broke down because "the Queen of England through her commissioners insists on the removal from these countries of all foreign soldiery . . . and on freedom being granted to the Reformed religion in Holland and Zealnd." 4 England increasingly appeared to be the champion and defender of Protestant Europe, and Philip decided that the best way to ensure a victory for God and Spain would be to bring the English to heel by means of a great Armada.4


4 Von Klarwill, op. cit., II, 161, Antwerp, May 21, 1588; see also ibid., II, 157–158, 176–178.

There was clearly cause to be confident due to a previous great victory at sea: the triumph over the Turks at Lepanto in 1571. It was a joint Christian (Catholic) effort in the Mediterranean, with the expenses paid one-sixth by the papacy, one-third by Venice, and one-half by Spain. Yet, due to the Spanish Empire's heavy reliance on its Italian possessions, two-thirds of the ships and men of the combined fleet came from Italy. As a contemporary account proclaimed, "the Christian Armada" fought valiantly "against the arch-enemy of the Christian Faith." The courage of both the "Spaniards and Italians" was augmented by the fact that there "sprang up a wind to our assistance." Thus, against the larger (if less well armed) Turkish fleet, "the Christians had achieved victory with the help of the Lord." As Christian—and especially Catholic—Europe interpreted the victory, the seemingly invincible Turks had been swept from the sea by the irresistible and miraculous hand of God; it even evoked images of the drowning of Pharaoh's army in the Red Sea in that well-known biblical manifestation of Divine Providence.

Overall, Italy was of central importance in the maintenance of Spanish hegemony in the Mediterranean and Europe in the early modern period. The Spanish crown ruled about half of Italy directly: Milan, Naples, Sicily, and Sardinia. But it also had important, if at times strained, ties to several other leading Italian states: Venice, Genoa, Florence, and the Papal States. Central among the links of this Italian-Spanish bond was the fact that both Italy and Spain were staunchly Catholic areas in the age of the Reformation. This fact, however, also gave rise to the ambivalent stance of many Italians: while they generally supported Spanish efforts against the Turks in the south and the Protestants in the north, they were also anxious to prevent a universal "Spanish Preponderance," which had been greatly facilitated by France's descent into the Wars of Religion. Even so, while the Italians had good reasons to fear the con-

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1 As an example of Italian (Venetian) financing, see the petition of Marco di Geronimo Morosini for the equipping of a galley in 1570–1571, ASV Senato, Terra, filza 109, in David Chambers and Brian Pullan (eds.), Venice: A Documentary History, 1450–1630 (Oxford, 1992), pp. 255–256.


3 Peter Pierson, Philip II of Spain (London, 1975), p. 36.
siderable military threat posed by the Turks (as at Lepanto), that was
certainly not the case regarding the English, who posed no military
threat to Italy. Many Italians did realize, however, that Protestant En-
gland could tip the scales in the great religious struggle of the Reforma-
tion.

Therefore, as the preparations for a great Armada against England
were underway, Philip received considerable support from his own Ital-
ian domains, as well as from other parts of the peninsula. As one Italian
official wrote: "On religious grounds many Princes are on Your Majesty's
side." He went on to say that it was most appropriate that "the Catholic
King" should wage this "war on behalf of Christendom." Moreover, much
assistance evidently awaited this enterprise: "We are assured of the help
of the Virgin Mary, and of Germany, so grievously harried by the
heretics." With regard to the English Catholics, the official opined that,
"although I do not care to trust them blindly, [they will] in all proba-
Bility make some sort of diversion in our favor." Another factor working
against the English government was that "the Queen of England has no
India at her call to replace the cost." The official concluded by noting,
"The whole enterprise lies in the hands of God. Your Majesty has the
right on your side. . . ." Thus, this great undertaking was cast in a pri-
marily religious mold.

Perhaps the most complex and fascinating of all of Philip II's dealings
in Italy was with the papacy, especially with the strong-willed and opin-
ionated Pope Sixtus V (1585–1590). As was the case with most of the
popes of the period, Sixtus was torn between supporting the "Catholic
King" in matters that would strengthen the universal Church, and, at the
same time, trying to prevent any expansion of Spain's seeming strangle-
hold on Italy and Europe. Therefore, the very strained personal relations
between the king and the pope only exacerbated this religious/political
divide.9

By contrast, the monarch that the pope had the greatest admiration
for was, ironically, Elizabeth I. As he told the Venetian Ambassador early
in 1588: "She certainly is a great Queen, and were she only a Catholic
she would be our dearly beloved. Just look how well she governs; she
is only a woman, only mistress of half an island, and yet she makes her-

8See Ludwig von Pastor, The History of the Popes from the Close of the Middle Ages,
Ralph Francis Kerr (ed.) (London, 1932), Vol. XXI and Vol. XXII, 1–312; these volumes pro-
vide a somewhat dated but still indispensable portrait of Sixtus V and his eventful pontif-
icate.
self feared by Spain, by France, by the Empire, by all. She enriches her kingdom by Spanish booty, besides depriving Spain of Holland and Zealand." Still, as this fascinating comment reveals, although the pope might swoon over Elizabeth, he still believed that as the Vicar of Christ, he had to support Philip's efforts to regain northern lands for the Church. Accordingly, a league with Spain was concluded and, with regard to the Armada, the pope proposed the following: "a million of gold on news that a landing has been effected. The island is to be invested in the King of Spain or his nominee; and if anyone interferes to hinder the enterprise adequate steps will be taken against him." 

By August of 1588, however, before any news of the Armada had yet reached Rome, the pope's frustrations, never far from the surface, boiled over. Huge amounts had been expended, "upwards of thirteen millions," and nothing had been accomplished. He criticized Philip but again praised Elizabeth, as well as Drake! He offered a pessimistic but prophetic observation: "We are sorry to say it, but we have a poor opinion of this Spanish Armada, and fear some disaster." Yet, ironically, despite the pope's genuinely ambivalent feelings, the English evidently viewed Sixtus V as quite vehement in both his support for "the Enterprise" and his opposition to England and its queen. This was due to his renewal of the bulls of excommunication against Elizabeth and his granting of plenary "Indulgences to all that gave their Help and Assistance" against England. Evidently, what was true in the mind of the pope was generally true throughout Italy: a victory for the Catholic cause had to be pursued, even at the risk of strengthening the Spanish juggernaut. In other words, although most Italians lent their support, it trickled through various filters, especially in Rome and Venice. 

"Calendar of State Papers and Manuscripts, Relating to English Affairs, Existing in the Archives and Collections of Venice (London, 1894) (hereafter, CSPV), VIII, 345-346, Giovanni Gritti to the Doge and Senate, March 19, 1588. For some surprisingly positive Spanish views of Elizabeth, see Henry Kamen, Philip of Spain (New Haven, 1997), pp. 319-320.

11Von Klarwill, op. cit., II, 163, Rome, June 25, 1588; CSPV, VIII, 363, Giovanni Gritti to the Doge and Senate, July 2, 1588; Parker, Grand Strategy of Philip II, pp. 190-191.

12CSPV, VIII, 379, Giovanni Gritti to the Doge and Senate, August 20, 1588; William Camden, The History of the Most Renowned and Victorious Princess Elizabeth Late Queen of England, ed. Wallace T. MacCaffrey (Chicago, 1970), p. 311. According to one report of the excommunication, Elizabeth was "dispossessed of her kingdom, her lands and her subjects, being long since a condemned heretic." In her place, Philip was appointed "King of England and Ireland, and Protector of the Catholic Faith in that country," in von Klarwill, op. cit., I, 122-123, Salzburg, July 14, 1588.

Another example of divided and ambivalent loyalties was Portugal. In 1580, when the Portuguese throne became vacant, Philip II made good his claim and brought about the union of the two great European overseas empires under the Spanish crown. Portugal was as staunch as Spain in its support for the Catholic cause in the age of the Reformation, but a number of Portuguese bitterly opposed the annexation of their country by the seemingly voracious Spanish. As one example, just prior to the Spanish takeover, the Viceroy in Portuguese India wrote to Lisbon, “They would rather have a revolution and would submit to Turkish rule more readily than to Castilian[!]” On the other hand, an observer in Lisbon noted, “All the best people here are in favor of Spain but dare not let it be seen. But when the King of Spain appears here with his army he will be better received than he expects.” Many aristocrats evidently saw the “Catholic King” as a source, not only of patronage, but of greater unity of purpose and effort—religious, economic, and otherwise—for all of Iberia, even though, as in Italy, this would come at the cost of autonomy.

By 1588 this ambivalent relationship between Philip II and his Portuguese subjects was made more so by the preparations for the Armada, which was gathering in Lisbon. There were those who supported this combined Catholic effort against England and the Protestants of the north; but, at the same time, the financial and human toll was clearly being felt. Some Portuguese representatives went to Philip to implore him to remove the burden of the Armada from them because, they argued (though without success), it was contributing to the ruin of the country. This heightened tension between religious and political aspirations can be seen in the intriguing career and short-lived fame of the “Nun of Lisbon.”

Mary of the Visitation, the Mother Prioress of the Convent of the Annunciation in Lisbon, gained the aura of a saintly figure who was supposedly blessed with mystical revelations and the stigmata, the five wounds of Christ. Her claims appeared to be confirmed through several examinations by Church officials and, therefore, her predictions of great

14Von Klarwill, op. cit., II, 36, Antwerp, February 13, 1580; ibid., II, 37–38, Lisbon, February 26, 1580; and see ibid., II, 29, 43.

16See Kamen, Philip of Spain, pp. 27, 168–177, 242–245. As one important example of interdependence, in manning its armadas and fleets in the sixteenth century, Spain relied for about one-fifth of its crews on non-Spaniards, especially Portuguese and Italians; see Pablo E. Perez-Mallaina, Spain’s Men of the Sea: Daily Life on the Indies Fleets in the Sixteenth Century, trans. Carla Rahn Phillips (Baltimore, 1998).

16CSPV, VIII, 334–335, Hieronimo Lippomano to the Doge and Senate, January 20, 1588.
success for the Armada boosted religious and military morale. But the facade of sanctity crumbled when it came to light that two friars of her order, the Dominicans, had thus induced her and that the “stigmata” had in fact been painted on her body. Evidently, the plan had been to have the Mother Prioress use her spiritual prestige to convince Philip II, at some future point, that he was bound by God to withdraw from Portugal and hand it over to Dom Antonio. The two friars were sent to prisons of the Inquisition and the nun was condemned “to perpetual prison in a convent not of her own order outside the city.”17 This incident provides a particularly telling illustration of dramatic opposition between religious and political aspirations, between a desire for a combined Catholic victory over England, and yet, at the same time, for a Portuguese political victory over Spain by means of the restored independence of Portugal. Although this is an admittedly unusual example, if even a nun in a cloistered convent and some friars could feel so strongly these divergent impulses, so too undoubtedly could many of their native countrymen and women.

The country where the political and religious situation was especially complex and bloody was France. Few states in the sixteenth century were as fractured by the religious wars as was “the eldest daughter of the Church.” King Henry III, as a politique, usually tried to steer a middle course between the Protestants (the Huguenots under Henry of Navarre) and the Catholics (organized into the Catholic League under Henry of Guise). The resulting “War of the Three Henries” devastated France and drew it ever more deeply into the European-wide religious and political divide.18 This can be seen in a particularly dramatic light with regard to Spain and the Armada.

Although Spain and France were traditional enemies in the early modern period, opinions concerning the Armada generally broke down along religious lines, even though these did not necessarily coincide with political affinities. While awaiting news of the Armada, the Venetian Ambassador in France noted that both the Catholics and the

17 Von Klarwill, op. cit., I, 114–121, Lisbon, November 10, 1587; CSPV, VIII, 418–419, 421, Lippomano to the Doge and Senate, December 14 and 31, 1588. With regard to Spanish attitudes toward visionaries, especially in the years surrounding the Armada, see Kamen, Philip of Spain, pp. 281–283. See also the intriguing article on female spirituality, alleged possession, and early modern convents, Moshe Sluhovsky, “The Devil in the Convent,” American Historical Review, 107 (2002), 1379–1411.

Huguenots feared a loss for their side, and undoubtedly summed up the opposing sentiments by concluding that "a great blessing or a great misfortune for France hangs upon the issue." In the months after the Armada, this same ambassador commented on the attempts of both Spain and England to win the amity of France, seen as crucial to the outcome of the conflicts raging in Europe. The Spanish Ambassador in his meetings with Henry III tried to win him over to the wider Catholic cause, promising that if the King of France helped in the war against the English, the King of Spain would lend him support against the Huguenots. On their part, the English were inclined to believe that, although there was a danger of the Catholic League lending ships and opening French ports to the Armada, they expected "neither the French King, nor the havens and port towns that stand for the King," to give any assistance to the Spaniards. In fact, in 1589 the English proposed a far-reaching alliance with Henry III and other states against Spain. Among the French, tensions were probably especially acute for many in the Catholic League, devoted as they were to France, but also to the triumph of Catholicism, seeing in Spain an ally of co-religionists in their struggle against the Protestant King of Navarre.

The situation in Scotland was ambivalent for reasons that were not only religious and political, but also quite personal. The execution of Mary, Queen of Scots in February, 1587, resulted in a range of strong reactions in Scotland and across Europe. Most important—and ambivalent—was the reaction of Mary's son, James VI, King of Scots. He had never really known his mother, and her deposition had allowed him to ascend the Scottish throne. In addition, she had been a Catholic, whereas he had been raised as a devout Calvinist. Still, he had interceded on her behalf (though how earnestly is open to debate), and the beheading of a consecrated monarch who also happened to be his mother caused James some undoubted grief and gave rise to quite a "storm" in Scotland. Although some Protestants were glad to hear of Mary's death, it also stoked Scottish nationalism and resentment of their traditional enemy, England.

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9 CSPV, VIII, 376, Giovanni Mocenigo to the Doge and Senate, August 15, 1588.
10 Ibid., VIII, 410–411, Mocenigo to the Doge and Senate, November 6, 1588.
Relations between the two “British” monarchs were strained for some time, but mutual dependencies prevented any permanent rupture. Elizabeth wrote to James, insisting “how innocent I am in this case. . . .” In response, James expressed the desire for “a full satisfaction in all respects,” seeing this as a means “to strengthen and unite this isle,” as well as to “establish and maintain the true religion. . . .”24 Elizabeth needed to maintain peace on her northern border as the threat of the Armada loomed ever larger, whereas James was committed to Protestantism and also hoped to succeed to the English throne at the queen’s death.

Additionally, with regard to the execution of the Queen of Scots, Elizabeth wrote to win back the support of Henry III, but he remained cool for some time because of “the cruel and inhuman act” of the execution of Mary, who had been both a Catholic monarch and his sister-in-law.25 An intriguing expression of English sentiment regarding these developments can be seen in a comment of Lord Howard in January of 1588: “I have made of the French King, the Scottish King, and the King of Spain, a Trinity that I mean never to trust to be saved by,” and he clearly hoped that others, especially the queen, were of the same opinion.26

On their part, the Spaniards hoped that, in spite of religious differences, the resentment felt by James and the Scots over the English execution of the Scottish queen would lead to support for the Armada. There was even talk of the possible opening of Scottish ports to Spanish vessels.27 That, of course, was not to happen. For James, his deeply held Protestant convictions reinforced his broader political interests and proved decisive. Thus, for the King of Scots, his “continual good Affection to the true Religion and the Queen” factored into his shrewd strategic assessment and prevented Philip II from getting his foot in the Scottish door. In fact, James took action against Scottish Catholics, as well as other steps to thwart the Spanish designs.28

By the summer of 1588, James had evidently come full circle in his support for Elizabeth. He informed the queen that he embraced “your godly and honest cause, whereby your adversaries may have ado not with England but with the whole isle of Britain.” He wished for success.

24Leah S. Markus, Janel Mueller, and Mary Beth Rose (eds.) Elizabeth I: Collected Works (Chicago, 2000) (hereafter, CW), pp. 296–297, Elizabeth to James, February 14, 1587; and James to Elizabeth, March, 1587.
27Von Klarrwill, op. cit., II. 145, Antwerp, November 5, 1587.
against "God's professed enemies," and one of his officials even claimed that the king was willing "to hazard his Crown and life in defense of her Majesty." The rhetorical flourish aside, James's loyalty was undoubtedly strengthened by the pension of one hundred thousand crowns a year that Elizabeth had begun to pay him. Even so, the King of Scots was willing to play the Catholic card as well as the Protestant one—on both the domestic and foreign fronts—and he may have received money from Spain as well as England.

In any event, when the Armada retreated north around Scotland, James forbade "delivery to the Spaniards of food or munitions on pain of death." He evidently had concluded that a Spanish (and Catholic) victory was a threat not only to England, but to Scotland as well. The king's rather amusing, classical assessment was: "That he looked for no other Favour from the Spaniard than what Polyphemus promised Ulysses, namely, that after all the rest were devoured, he should be swallowed the last." Therefore, in spite of centuries of often intense English-Scottish animosity, there would be no help for Spain's war against England from Calvinist Scotland or its devout but opportunistic king.

Perhaps most interesting of all in this world of religious and political alliances and intrigues was the role of the Ottoman Empire (Turkey) in these ongoing conflicts. On the one hand, Christian Europe saw the Turks as religious infidels and as a very real military threat, both in the Mediterranean and in central Europe. On the other hand, the classic adage that "my enemy's enemy is my friend" was operative. In particular, the Most Christian Kings of France played the Turkish card throughout the sixteenth century in their ongoing conflicts with the Habsburgs. Many, especially the Most Catholic King of Spain and His Holiness the Pope, were exasperated by what seemed to be shameful consorting with the archenemy of Christendom.

Although the existence of the Franco-Turkish alliance is generally well known, it raises some compelling and unanswered questions, especially in the context of the Armada. It is intriguing to speculate as to why so many in Christian, and largely Catholic, France were willing to

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29CW, pp. 356–357; James to Elizabeth, August 1, 1588; CSPScot, 550, William Ashley to Lord Burghley, August 6, 1588; CSPV, VIII, 374, Mocenigo to the Doge and Senate, August 11, 1588.


31Von Klarwill, op. cit., II, 175, Antwerp, September 3, 1588; Camden, op. cit., p. 329.

consort with the Muslim Turks, but generally not with the Protestant English, against the Spaniards. Although political realities and advantages were clearly important factors, the religious conundrum remains and has not been adequately addressed. Among other calculations, perhaps there was little hope for the conversion of the Muslim "infidels," but greater hope of winning back the Protestant "heretics." In any event, ambivalent, if not contradictory, religious and political stances could hardly be starker.

On its part, England made overtures to both the Turks of the Ottoman Empire and the Moors in Morocco, especially as the threat of the Armada drew ever closer. In her search for allies, Queen Elizabeth tried to make common cause with the Turkish and the Moroccan rulers against the Spanish menace. The Turks spoke about equipping a fleet against the King of Spain, and, in return, the Queen of England sent subsidies to Istanbul (Constantinople). Even Spain made some overtures to the Sultan, but it did not have "a regular and respectable embassy [at] the Porte," and its diplomacy with the Islamic world was clearly less successful than that of England. In fact, during the 1580's, the first ambassadors from the Ottoman Empire and the Kingdom of Morocco arrived in England to foster their countries' interests.

There were several compelling reasons why the English sought to develop good relations with the major Muslim states, and from the Muslims' point of view these arrangements were mutually beneficial. Thus, a range of commercial, diplomatic, and military ties were formed on the basis of mutual opportunities and threats to security, especially with regard to Catholic Spain and its empire. Yet, on the part of the English, or at least some of them, they undoubtedly experienced anxiety and discomfort due to the fact that their "godly," Christian nation was consorting with the followers of Muhammad. One means by which this unorthodox alliance may have been justified, and perhaps even seen as "holy" by some Britons, was through the linking of Catholicism—and especially Spain—with idolatry. An example of this mindset is revealed in a remarkable petition addressed to the Sultan by the English Ambassador in 1589. In it he boasts of "the most Holy Alliance" that their two countries had formed against "our common foes, all of them accursed idolaters. . . ." These included, in particular, "the King of Spain, the chief

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6Ibid., II, 120, Constantinople, October 1, 1586; CSPV, VIII, 350, Giovanni Gritti to the Doge and Senate; April 16, 1588; Parker, Grand Strategy of Philip II, p. 192.

7Von Klarwill, op. cit., II, 131-132, Constantinople, April 5, 1587.

8For an interesting discussion of several of the issues raised here, see Nabil Matar, Turks, Moors, and Englishmen in the Age of Discovery (New York, 1999), esp. pp. 3-42.
of all idolaters," and the Pope, who "is looked upon by these [Catholic] rulers as in some wise a God upon earth." In all, the ambassador used the word "idolaters" six times and concluded that "the proud Spaniard and the lying Pope will be cheated of their assured hope of victory and will suffer chastisement for their presumption."36

This suggests that the strong iconoclastic traditions of Islam and Protestantism may have formed a bond between these otherwise disparate religions (or at least were presented as such), thereby distinguishing them from their "idolatrous" Catholic enemies. Along those lines, in addition to the centuries-long and resolute iconoclasm of Islam, the condemnation of images became a hallmark of Protestantism, especially in the wake of the "second Reformation" from the late sixteenth century onward.37 In other words, although there were many commercial and military benefits to justify the English-Muslim alliance, the troublesome religious nature of this union was rationalized in a number of ways, including the argument that the terrible sin of Catholic idolatry was being stamped out by this otherwise strained Protestant-Islamic axis.

At the same time, political and religious realities and alliances were yet more complex because the Turks were able to enjoy good—or at least workable—relations with some Catholic powers. The case of France has already been discussed, and Venice provides another example. There were, of course, geopolitical forces at work, but, in addition, the Turks may have viewed these states as less inflexible in their Catholicism than Spain and the Papal States. For its part, Venice tried to steer a middle course through these troubled and murky waters. Even so, not long before the launching of the Armada, the Sultan complained: "The Venetians are not behaving as well as they used to. I am informed that they are helping the King of Spain, who is my enemy, against the Queen of England, who is my ally." The Venetian Ambassador denied this and even enlisted the support of the English Ambassador on his behalf. On the other hand, shortly after the Armada had been launched, the Venetian Ambassador in Madrid wrote: "We now await the news of its voyage, which, pray God, may be successful."38 These varied sentiments are not merely a reflection of different diplomatic posts. More funda-

36 Von Klarwill, op. cit., II, 205–207, Constantinople, November 8, 1589.
37 See, for example, the vehement condemnation of "idolatry" in a letter from William Bedell, chaplain to the English ambassador in Venice, to Adam Newton, Dean of Durham, January 1, 1608, in Chambers and Pullan, op. cit., pp. 195–196.
38 CSPV, VIII, 357–358, Moro to the Doge and Senate, May 18, 1588; ibid., VIII, 371, Lippomano to the Doge and Senate, July 29, 1588.
mentally, they demonstrate Venetian ambivalence: hoping for a Catholic victory, but also desiring to remain on good terms with all in order to retain Venice’s still important position in the Mediterranean world.

As for the Armada itself, preparations had long been underway and there were few illusions of a simple or assured victory. Although, as we have seen, there were political and economic considerations in play, the religious factor was front and center. In an engraving of Philip II as defender of the faith the motto read: “Religion is the highest priority.” It is true, of course, that Philip made use of religious propaganda, though less so (and generally less successfully) than Elizabeth I and some other rulers. At the same time, Philip’s religious convictions were deeper than those of most other sixteenth-century monarchs. In addition to the material preparations for the Armada, which cost a total of about ten million ducats, the spiritual component was seen as vital. Both before and after the launching of the Armada, Philip and much of Spain prayed for success. It was reported that the King “passes day and night in prayer,” and that “Spain is full of processions, austerities, fasting and devotion.” It was even said that the entire royal family prayed before the Blessed Sacrament for three hours daily in relays in the chapel of the Escorial. Overall, many Catholics in Spain and elsewhere believed that the “Enterprise of England” was directed to the service of God, and they, in essence, “sacralized” this undertaking. Even in a society that had fought a centuries-long Reconquista against the Moors, the spiritual preparations for the Armada appear to have been grounded in decidedly more than mere religious rhetoric.

In fact, the Armada gave the appearance of a religious crusade, as opposed to a primarily secular military endeavor. In his General Orders to the fleet, the commander, the Duke of Medina Sidonia, stated that the expedition was being undertaken for “the service of God and the restitution of many people to the bosom of the Church. Therefore all officers are to see that their subordinates come on board confessed and communicated.” In addition, impious activities were forbidden—includ-

Parker, Grand Strategy of Philip II, pp. 93–95.

Compare, for example, Kamen, Philip of Spain, esp. pp. 228–232, with Carole Levin, The Heart and Stomach of a King: Elizabeth I and the Politics of Sex and Power (Philadelphia, 1994).

CSPV, VIII, 363. Lippomano to the Doge and Senate, July 2, 1588; Parker, Grand Strategy of Philip II, pp. 201–203, 269.
ing the removal of more than six hundred prostitutes from the fleet just before sailing—and various religious observances were mandated. Other indications of the crusading mentality included the fact that the ships had red crosses on their sails and the “principal men” of the fleet had crosses on their garments. Moreover, the Duke of Parma’s flagship had the royal standard on one side and, on the other, an image of the crucified Christ surrounded by the Blessed Virgin Mary and St. John the Baptist.

Although the English also prayed for victory, they prepared more effectively than the Spaniards for the coming titanic battle. And this brings to the forefront one of the biggest myths of the Armada campaign: the perception of a Spanish Goliath bearing down on an English David. Military leaders in England played upon this apparent disparity, in part to nudge the queen away from her pacific and parsimonious tendencies. Sir Francis Drake urged his sovereign to increase English forces by land and sea, warning: “There was never any force so strong as there is now ready or making ready against your Majesty and true religion,” while also claiming: “The Lord of all strengths is stronger. . . .” The reality was that the English held the advantage in terms of the number, the speed, and the maneuverability of their ships, and in the range and firepower of their artillery. As the English commander, Lord Howard of Effingham, boasted in the month before the engagement, Queen Elizabeth had “the strongest ships that any prince [in] Christendom hath.” The English were, in fact, well prepared in both the quality and quantity of their fleet to meet the enemy on more than equal terms.

Much ado was also made of the legendary “Protestant” wind, which supposedly swept the Spaniards from the seas. One particularly dramatic English account claimed that due to the “very great storm,” many of the enemy would never see Spain again. This was clearly seen as the “work of God, to chastise their malicious practices, and to make them know that neither the strengths of men, nor their idolatrous gods can prevail, when the mighty God of Israel stretcheth out but his finger

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62 CSPV, VIII, 356-357, “General Orders to be obeyed throughout the Fleet during this Campaign,” May 8, 1588; Von Klarwill, op. cit., 1, 121-122, Madrid, May 18, 1588.

63 Laughton, op. cit., I, 21-22, June 23, 1588; ibid., II, 223, September 12, 1588; Parker, Grand Strategy of Philip II, p. 240. See also “Las Banderas de la Gran Armada 1588,” Revista de Historia Naval, 7 (1989), 7-32.

64 Laughton, op. cit., I, 147-149, Drake to the Queen, April 13, 1588.

65 Ibid., I, 201, Howard to Walsingham, June 14, 1588; Camden, op. cit., pp. 311-312, 321-323.
against them." But here, too, the situation was more complex. At various points during the length of the campaign, in late July and early August of 1588, the winds favored or distressed both the Spanish and the English. It is true, of course, that off the coast of Gravelines the English gained and generally held the weather-gage, and having the wind in their favor certainly added to their tactical advantages. But, perhaps most importantly, nature was believed to be at God's command, and tales, both true and false, of how "the winds of God" had devastated the enemy were widely used to shape the interpretation of the Armada's demise—especially with regard to its supposed religious implications.

The contemporary religious "spin" on the Armada can also be seen in a fascinating way by looking at the various rumors that spread about its supposed success or failure, before the true story became widely known. Although much of the propaganda and many of the rumors were not true, they provide intriguing insights into the mentalities of the period, as well as the important role of rumor-mongering in an age of pre-modern communications. As an example, a report in mid-July from the Venetian Ambassador in Prague stated that there was news from Cologne "that the Armada has had an engagement with the English fleet, and been victorious, taking one hundred ships, and losing forty..." But, he wisely added, little credence was given to the report at that early date. Also, a dispatch from an Italian official in Rouen in early August gave thanks to God for the "good news" that, supposedly after a long battle, "victory remained with us, as we sank fifteen of the enemy, including the flag ship." Clearly, there was empathy in Catholic circles well beyond Spain for the Armada campaign, despite the risk of even greater Spanish hegemony in Europe.

On the other hand, the news during the same period in Hamburg (a center of Protestantism in north Germany) was that "eighteen ships of the Spanish Armada were sunk by gunfire, and eight taken and brought to England," while the rest of the fleet fled to the French coast. At the same time, in what was perhaps a nationalist version of a plague on both their houses, the account concluded: "If this is true it will somewhat abate Spanish insolence and give the English fresh courage, though they have no lack of insolence either." In fact, during this period,

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61 Laughton, op. cit., II, 41–42, Thomas Fenner to Walsingham, August 4, 1588 (emphasis added).
63 CSPV, VIII, 370, Vincenzo Gradenigo to the Doge and Senate, July 19, 1588; ibid., VIII, 380–381, August 7, 1588.
exaggerated reports of victory and booty were circulating in London, and one claim in mid-August was that "altogether 36 [Spanish] ships have been brought to this country." 49

Even by late August and early September, optimism still abounded in many Catholic capitals. The Venetian Senate sent the following dispatch to its ambassador in Spain: "From many quarters we hear of the success of the Armada, and we rejoice. We order you to offer our congratulations to his majesty." In Prague, an announcement stated that "the Spanish Armada has fought the English and the English have succumbed. At this the rejoicing here is universal." 50 An even more astounding report reached a number of Catholic cities, including Rome and Prague, according to which: "Parma had effected a junction with the Armada," an English port had been seized, and the Spanish had "landed eight thousand infantry and thirty pieces of artillery." Still, Pope Sixtus V was skeptical and refused to hand over the promised million ducats to Spain without solid proof of the landing of the Armada in England. 51

A final example of rumors is provided by far-away Istanbul. As late as October, conflicting reports were circulating about the fate of the Armada. An exaggerated account by an Englishman claimed: "The navy of his Queen has defeated the Spanish Armada, captured most of it and killed the Spaniards." On the other side was the contention that "news has already been received here in print assigning the victory to the Spanish Armada." In the middle were several Catholic ambassadors who wished to steer a cautious diplomatic course and thus: "The French and Venetian ambassadors are said to have declared that they know nothing definite about the Armada." Therefore, in an Islamic capital, too, religious and political calculations determined how the voyage of the Armada was to be interpreted. 52

The reality was that England had won an important victory over Spain, but the extent and long-term significance of that victory, as well as the overall implications of the Armada venture, were to be disputed at the time and ever since. Even as the Armada was being dispersed in the Channel in early August, Queen Elizabeth made a dramatic appearance and spoke to the troops assembled at Tilbury. She concluded: "We


50CSPV, VIII, 381, Doge and Senate to Lippomano, August 27, 1588; von Klarwill, op. cit., II, 175, Prague, August 30, 1588.

51CSPV, VIII, 380, Gritti to the Doge and Senate, August 27, 1588; von Klarwill, op. cit., II, 174-175, Rome, August 27, 1588; ibid., II, 175-176, Prague, September 8, 1588.

52Ibid., II, 179-180, Constantinople, October 7, 1588.
shall shortly have a famous victory over these enemies of my God and of my kingdom." Thus, with her usual astuteness, Elizabeth emphasized both the religious and political nature of her commitment. In one of her public prayers, the "Christian Deborah" gave thanks to God saying, "Thou hast this year made [your bounty] serve for instruments both to daunt our foes and to confound their malice." So too in one of her poems, the queen recalled the God who had saved the chosen people of old, and who now "hath done wonders in my days./ He made the winds and waters rise/ to scatter all mine enemies."55

But celebrations were also of a very public nature. Queen Elizabeth commanded public "Prayers and Thanksgiving to be used throughout all the Churches of England," and the queen herself "gave most hearty thanks to God, and heard a Sermon, wherein the Glory was given to God alone." Several coins were struck to commemorate the victory, including one "with a Fleet flying with full Sails, and this Inscription, Venit, vidit, fugit, that is, It came, it saw, it fled...."56 In November there were major celebrations for the thirtieth anniversary of Elizabeth's accession and for the Armada victory, with prayers and thanksgivings at St. Paul's Cathedral and throughout the country. According to one account: "Like Pharaoh, the King of Spain has been punished. During these thanksgivings the Queen seemed very magnificent and devout."56

Not only in England, but in many other Protestant areas as well, a "Providentialist" view abounded: victory had been won by the hand (or breath) of God in support of the true faith. Thus, the States of Zealand compared Philip II to the Pharaoh whose heart had been hardened, and concluded that Elizabeth's "justice and innocence will prevail over his pride." The Council of the United Provinces praised Elizabeth for being "the defender of God's church and of this country." The Dutch also is-

5CW, pp. 325–326, "Queen Elizabeth's Armada Speech to the Troops at Tilbury," August 9, 1588.


sued a medal celebrating the Armada's demise, which had the inscription: "God blew and they were scattered." 57

Moreover, a Dutchman, Emanuel van Meteren, wrote one of the best contemporary accounts of the battle of the Armada: "The miraculous victory achieved by the English Fleete." He provided a reasoned religious and military account, though his Protestant point-of-view was evident. He observed that "humble prayers and supplications" had arisen from throughout England and the United Provinces, and it was considered most apparent "that God [had] miraculously preserved the English nation." 58 Van Meteren concluded his work with a poem written by Theodore Beza, the French Calvinist scholar and theologian. Beza ended his paean to Queen Elizabeth with these highly charged words: "And now, O Queene, above all others blest, / For whom both windes and waves are prest to fight. / So rule your owne, so succour friends oppressed. / . . . That England you, you England long enjoy, / No lesse your friends' delight, then foes annoy." 59

This belief in the role of Divine Providence was widespread in the sixteenth century. Even the practical English saw this as vital. When the Earl of Leicester discussed the need for the queen to continue preparations against the impending Armada, he also acknowledged a dependence on God to "miraculously give her victory" against the mighty enemy. 60 On their part, most Spaniards viewed this as indispensable if they were to achieve victory. This was expressed perhaps most dramatically by one of the captains of the Spanish fleet. As the Armada was being prepared, he said, evidently with a combination of despair and hope: "unless God help us by a miracle the English, who have faster and handier ships than ours, and many more long-range guns . . . . [will]

57Laughton, op. cit., II, 48-52, The States of Zealand to the Queen, August 6, 1588; ibid., II, 71-72, The Council of State of the United Provinces to the Queen, August 8, 1588; Parker, Grand Strategy of Philip II, pp. 98-99.
60Laughton, op. cit., I, 318-321, Leicester to Walsingham, July 26, 1588.
knock us to pieces with their culvérsins, without our being able to do them any serious hurt." Therefore, he concluded, "we are sailing against England in the confident hope of a miracle!"\footnote{61}

For the Spaniards, a miracle did not materialize, and the reaction in Spain and other Catholic areas was a decidedly mixed one. The immediate effect was a general mood of despair and resignation to the sometimes inscrutable will of God. As Philip II himself said of the attack on England: "I was not moved by desire for new kingdoms; I am well content with those given me by his divine Majesty. I have consumed my patrimony. The cause is God’s and touches the honor of myself and my kingdom." A sense of loss and even disaster was widespread throughout the country. At the same time, a sense of propriety and trust in the ways of God was maintained: public mourning was prohibited, prayers and a forty days' fast were ordered for the return of missing ships, and solemn Masses of thanksgiving were ordered, both for those who had returned safely, and (as the King prayed) for continued divine guidance in future actions "which shall be most to His service, the exaltation of His church, [and] the good and preservation of Christendom...."\footnote{62}

To that end, the Spanish mood of despair was transformed into one of defiance and renewed confidence in the rightness of their cause. From the Spanish community in Rome to the Cortes in Madrid, there was a conviction that God would bless further efforts and that they would be successful. In fact, representatives of the Cortes told the king that they would "vote four or five millions of gold, their sons, and all that they possess so that he [might] chastise that woman and wipe out the stain which this year has fallen on the Spanish nation...."\footnote{63} Most of Philip's subjects remained devoted to him, and one report noted that many places in Spain offered to build new ships—along English lines—and supply men to "His Sacred Majesty" for another Armada. Some time later, the king was "gratified to hear of the grant of eight millions of ducats which His Majesty's subjects" offered to continue the war against England.\footnote{64}

\footnote{61}Quoted in Mattingly, \textit{op. cit.}, pp. 216–217.
\footnote{62}CSPV, VIII, 402, Philip II to the Procurators of the Cortes, October 7, 1588; \textit{ibid.}, pp. 404–405, Philip II to all Spanish prelates, October 13, 1588; von Klarwill, \textit{op. cit.}, I, 130, Middelburg, November 14, 1588; Parker, \textit{Grand Strategy of Philip II}, pp. 269–271.
\footnote{63}Von Klarwill, \textit{op. cit.}, II, 181–182, Rome, October 29, 1588; CSPV, VIII, 412, Lippomano to the Doge and Senate, November 16, 1588.
\footnote{64}Von Klarwill, \textit{op. cit.}, II, 183–184, Rome, November 26, 1588; \textit{ibid.}, II, 188–189, Venice, March 17, 1589.
From Philip's Italian dominions, too, aid was forthcoming in 1589. It was reported that the Kingdom of Naples, "in addition to the recently announced one million two hundred thousand crowns, has decided to send as much again this year to assist the King of Spain. It is hoped by this to give a good example to the Duchy of Milan." Moreover, Philip made use of religious loyalties to raise additional money in Italy—from Florence, Genoa, and the Papal States. Another very interesting indication of support came from Venice: "Some declare they have seen an agent of the Queen of England here who has asked the government to hand him over for cash 6000 muskets. But this was at once refused, as the arms were sure to be used against the Catholics." This was more credible than an earlier rumor that had circulated in Venice: "Some here think that the King of France might possibly cede Calais to the King of Spain so that the Spanish fleet might shelter there in case of need." It was remarkable, indeed, that the rumor mills could even suggest that France might turn Calais over to Spain after its relatively recent “liberation,” only thirty years earlier, ending more than two centuries of English control. Once again, some contemporary voices were suggesting that political realities should give way to religious sensibilities, while others held firm to the mandate of raison d'État.

Another aspect of the conflict between Spain and its enemies that was undoubtedly colored by the growing religious divide was the development of the "Black Legend." The origins of this multi-pronged attack on Spanish beliefs and behavior—whether real or, in many cases, imagined—can be traced to the Low Countries and the growing religious and political chasm between the Spanish and the Dutch. This blackening of the Spanish character spread widely, especially in Protestant Europe. As the Anglo-Spanish war commenced in 1585 and continued for nearly twenty years, the level of animosity between these antagonists grew particularly bitter. Still, although Spanish propaganda made use of the concept of "perfidious Albion," it was in no way comparable to the depth and ferocity of anti-Spanish sentiment that developed among the English. In his perceptive study of this phenomenon, William Maltby suggests three factors that contributed to the development of the Black Legend in England: the onset and progress of the Reformation; a growing sense of national consciousness; and, most di-

*Ibid., II, 186, Rome, February 11, 1589; ibid., II, 194, Genoa, July 9, 1589.*

*Ibid., II, 200-201, Venice, January 26, 1590; ibid., II, 183, Venice, November 25, 1588.*
rectly, the outbreak of the Anglo-Spanish war, culminating in the Ar-
mada.\textsuperscript{67}

The depth and irrationality of such feelings can be seen in some of
the contemporary popular English songs and ballads written about the
Armada (about twenty-four of which are still extant). Among those that
were perhaps most vociferously anti-Spanish were the ones produced
by Thomas Deloney, a balladeer, novelist, and yeoman weaver. In "A joy-
ful new Ballad," he opens with the words: "O Noble England, fall down
upon thy knee!/ And praise thy GOD, with thankful heart, which still
maintaineth thee!" He goes on to discuss the horrors that England has
allegedly been spared, with one particularly memorable stanza describ-
ing the designs of the malevolent Spaniards: "Our pleasant country, so
beautiful and so fair,/ They do intend, by deadly war, to make both poor
and bare./ Our towns and cities, to rack and sack likewise,/ To kill and
murder man and wife as malice doth arise;/ And to deflower [sic] our vir-
gins in our sight;/ And in the cradle cruelly the tender babe to smite./
GOD's Holy Truth, they mean for to cast down,/ And to deprive our no-
ble Queen both of her life and crown.\textsuperscript{68}

Thus, it is alleged, the goal of the heartless Spaniards was to over-
throw, by any means necessary, both "God's Holy Truth" (i.e., Protes-
tantism) and Queen Elizabeth, who was sustaining it. This dangerous
link between Spain and Catholicism is made clear in another of De-
looney's ballads, where he warns his listeners against "what the Pope and
Spaniards both prepared for our gain." He then describes instruments of
torture that were supposedly found on some of the Spanish ships: "One
sort of whips, they had for men,/ so smarting, fierce, and fell,/ As like
could never be devised by any devil in hell. . . ." Deloney thereby raises
the dreaded specter of the Inquisition. This demonic imagery was, in
fact, a figment of the imagination as no such devices were found on the
Armada. As Maltby correctly concludes, this is a manifestation of "the
Black Legend with a vengeance."\textsuperscript{69} And it suggests, sadly, that religious
impulses and hatreds were at the heart of this profound animus that
could conjure up such hellish threats evidently emanating from the
Spanish and Catholic worlds.

\textsuperscript{67}Hillgarth, \textit{op. cit.}, pp. 309–327, 376–395; William S. Maltby, \textit{The Black Legend in Eng-
land: The Development of Anti-Spanish Sentiment, 1558–1660} (Durham, North Car-
and Parker, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 261.
\textsuperscript{69}Pollard, \textit{op. cit.}, pp. 498–502; Maltby, \textit{op. cit.}, pp. 82–83.
The Black Legend was also reinforced by an English "reinvention" of the Armada, transforming it into the supposedly "Invincible Armada." In actuality, in Spanish and Catholic circles, it had been referred to as the "Great Armada" (which in size it certainly was) or as the "Catholic Armada" (stressing the religious nature of the undertaking). In contrast, it was Lord Burghley who wrote a pamphlet about the Armada campaign and concluded with the ringing phrase: "So ends this account of the misfortunes of the Spanish Armada which they used to call INVINCIBLE." This was also picked up by Camden, who wrote that the Spanish fleet was the best furnished "of any that ever the Ocean saw; and called by the arrogant name of Invincible..."70

This clever and ironic bit of propaganda added yet another dimension to the Black Legend: in addition to tyranny and ambition, the Spaniards were also guilty of cowardice and incompetence. Never mind that such assessments flew in the face of evidence that Spanish discipline and fortitude had been commendable, even in the worst of the fighting, or that the English, for all their advantages, had suffered their own toll and had not destroyed the Armada. As an English master gunner wrote to Burghley: "What can be said but our sins was the cause that so much powder and shot spent, and so long time in fight, and, in comparison thereof, so little harm?"71 It is quite instructive that even in their own assessment, the English believed that the extent of the victory over the Spaniards had been limited by their own sinfulness.

There is no doubt, however, that the battle of the Armada was in fact a great victory for England and added to the prestige of the Elizabethan age. At the same time, reports of the demise of Spain were very much exaggerated.72 With regard to Spanish sea power, the thought-provoking assessment of Garrett Mattingly is certainly correct: "The defeat of the

70CSPV, VIII, 369, Lippomano to the Doge and Senate, July 14, 1588; Martin and Parker, op. cit., p. 261; Camden, op. cit., p. 318.

71Maltby, op. cit., pp. 76-77; Mattingly, op. cit., p. 310; Laughton, op. cit., II, 258-260. William Thomas to Burghley, September 30, 1588; and see ibid., II, 138-139, 213-214. It is true that the English had "out-sailed, out-manoeuvered, and out-fought the Spaniards as they had always expected to do. But they had neither broken the Armada's formation nor destroyed its ships by their gunfire as they had believed with equal confidence that they would," in Wernham, op. cit., p. 407. According to another assessment, "The English were full of the euphoria of victory, but at the same time perplexed what to do next. The failure of their new weapons to achieve the devastating effects they had expected was worrying," in Rodger, op. cit., p. 272.

72In fact, more than a year after the defeat of the Armada, in November, 1589, Pope Sixtus V indicated the continued predominance of Spain and Philip II by frankly admitting that in his capacity as the temporal sovereign of the Papal States, the pope was "like a fly
Armada was not so much the end as the beginning of the Spanish navy. The Spaniards learned from many of their mistakes and built better, faster ships to replace those that had been lost. Not only did the treasure fleets continue to sail, but in the period from the defeat of the Armada to the death of Elizabeth, more American treasure poured into Spain from the New World than in any comparable period in Spanish history. Although English cruisers tried to intercept the treasure ships, they were generally quite unsuccessful. As an example, a report in 1590 lauded "the arrival in Seville from New Spain of the fleet with eight millions in gold. More ships are expected to arrive shortly, which had to remain behind on account of storms. They are bringing a further four millions."

Overall, Spain did not succumb to a prolonged period of defeatism. In fact, many Spaniards manifested a mood of defiance and renewed religious fervor, and reasserted their commitment to fight for both faith and country for God and king. Although some disillusionment with Philip II surfaced in the last decade of his long reign (as well as after his death), he was still widely viewed in Spain and other parts of the Catholic world as the great defender of the faith, as the "Catholic King." Even after the significant setback of the Armada, divine favor was still believed to rest upon him. This is clearly suggested by a remarkable story of a "terrifying miracle" in 1590: "One morning, as the King after praying in his oratory before a crucifix ... wished to kiss the image of Christ, the latter turned away from him. This greatly horrified and frightened the King and he once more began to pray that God might forgive him his sins. He thereupon once more tried to kiss the image of Christ, which again withdrew from him." Distraught, Philip sent for his Father Confessor, who prayed for discernment. He had the king send for two of his councilors "and bid them kiss the crucifix. They did so and soon thereafter fell sick and died." As the account concluded, "Some aver that the crucifix was poisoned so that the King might lose his life thereby."

The belief that the crucified Christ had acted directly and miraculously to save the life of his anointed servant—and the fact that this compared to an elephant before the king on whose dominions the sun never set," in Pastor, op. cit., XXI, 273.


"Von Klarwill, op. cit., I, 142–143, Venice, January 12, 1590. Over the long haul, the "dream of both the French and the English had always been to capture the fabulous wealth of a flota, and this became a dominant, perhaps the dominant theme in English naval strategy not only in the sixteenth century but well into the eighteenth. They never succeeded," in Rodger, op. cit., p. 242.

"Von Klarwill, op. cit., I, 148, Venice, April 6, 1590."
story evidently spread widely—suggests that, although Philip’s costly
wars demanded great sacrifices and clearly aroused some opposition,
many of his subjects still believed that their king was blessed with di-
vine favor. Interestingly, a parallel miracle was reported some years later
in which another Catholic monarch, Henry IV of France (who had con-
verted to Catholicism), was prevented from receiving a poisoned host
at Mass—in this case through the intervention of a particularly pre-
scient dog!76 In an age of religious conflict, such stories reinforced the
belief, at least in many Catholic circles, that not only the Most Catholic
King of Spain, but other Catholic Kings as well, were under divine pro-
tection.

As for Spain, although the Armada went down to defeat, it held on to
almost all of its empire—and all of its Catholic lands—not only through
the reign of Philip II but well into the future. Although the seven north-
ern, mostly Protestant, provinces of the Netherlands broke away, the ten
southern, mostly Catholic, provinces remained under the Habsburg
crown. As for Portugal, an attempt by the English in 1589 to capture Lis-
bon and ignite a Portuguese rebellion against the Spaniards was a fail-
ure and enlisted little support.77 Portugal was ruled by neighboring
Spain for another half-century, until 1640. Spanish crown lands in Italy,
as well as in the Americas, remained part of the empire into the eigh-
teenth or, in the latter case, the nineteenth century.78

Outside the Spanish Empire, the independent states of Italy continued
to support Spain, at least in its “Catholic” enterprises, despite the
potential political pitfalls. Several months after the events surrounding
the Armada, the Venetian Ambassador in France reported with approval
the words of the Spanish Ambassador concerning England: “Peace we
shall never make; [the queen] has not one shore only to defend; we
have now to attack her on all sides of her kingdom, and what is more
we have learned from experience that her Armada is not invincible.”77
Thus, the Spaniards tried to turn the tide on the issue of “invincibility,”

76Ibid., I, 246, Venice, July 16, 1604.
77On the Portugal Expedition of 1589, see Wernham, op. cit., pp. 92–130; Wallace Mac-
Caffrey, Elizabeth I: War and Politics, 1588–1603 (Princeton, 1992), pp. 73–96; Rodger,
op. cit., pp. 272–274.
78With regard to the interesting debate concerning the supposed “decline” of Spain, see
J. H. Elliott, Spain and its World, 1500–1700: Selected Essays (New Haven, 1989), Part IV;
Kamen, Golden Age Spain, pp. 61–65; Hillgarth, op. cit., pp. 503–519, 528–544; David
Goodman, Spanish Naval Power, 1589–1665: Reconstruction and Defeat (New York,
1997).
79CSPV, VIII, 413, Mocenigo to the Doge and Senate, November 21, 1588.
and they evidently believed that they could rely on Venice, and presumably on other Catholic powers as well, for various levels of support.

Yet, Venetian relations with Spain continued to be particularly complex. Venice's commitment to the Catholic cause was tempered, or at least mediated, by its perceived economic and political necessities. Thus, with the assassination of Henry III in 1589 and France's further descent into chaos, Venice and much of the rest of Europe feared that Spanish hegemony on the Continent would be evermore unopposed. In that year, the Florentine Ambassador wrote to his duke concerning these developments: "[It] seems that the Venetian government is deeply disaffected towards [the King of Spain], and suspects him more deeply than his good intentions deserve and their own prudence demands." He added, perhaps with a touch of hyperbole, "It would not be surprising if they began to have dealings with the Turks and the Huguenots, in order to create diversions when the need arose. . . ."

Venice continued to steer a careful course, balancing political and religious interests, well into the future. In a report by the Spanish Ambassador in Venice c. 1618, he referred to "the arrogance of our common enemy the Turk," but also astutely informed his sovereign: "The Republic greatly fears Your Majesty and the Turk," the two great Mediterranean powers that had the potential to threaten Venetian independence. Thus, as an equally astute English ambassador had noted a few years earlier concerning the Venetians, "Their general course in all divisions betwixt other Princes and states is to maintaine a neutrality which doth give them the advantage of time." As it was, Venice had supported Spain in the Armada campaign and continued to support other ventures of the Catholic "Counter-Reformation," so long as these did not threaten Venetian well being and "reason of state." Paradoxically, the "Serene Republic" continued to be both "extremely worldly" and "extremely religious."

With regard to France, it was embroiled in religious wars until the end of the sixteenth century and beyond. But Spanish support for the Catholic League was one of the major factors which precipitated

"Chambers and Pullan, op. cit., pp. 82-83, Raffaele de Medici to Ferdinando, Grand Duke of Tuscany, April 18, 1589.


Henry IV's conversion to the Catholic faith in 1593, an event that was a grievous blow to his former co-religionists such as Theodore Beza, and not least to Henry's Protestant "sister," Elizabeth. She wrote to him in great distress: "Ah what griefs, O what regrets, O what groanings felt I in my soul at the sound of such news. . . . He who has preserved you many years by His hand—can you imagine that He would permit you to walk alone in your greatest need?" Perhaps Elizabeth asked this question of herself as of Henry, but, even so, she is known to have sent him funds even after he turned from Protestantism. In any event, France as a whole remained solidly within the Catholic fold, although it continued its ambivalent stance toward Spain: some unity of purpose with regard to religion—especially antipathy toward the Huguenots—but great divergence with regard to political interests.

Therefore, in spite of what had seemed to be a disaster for Spain and the Catholic cause, i.e., the defeat of the Armada, events seemed to suggest a less drastic and more complex result. In this instance, as in many others, although political and economic factors were of considerable importance, religious loyalties often proved decisive. There were some compelling reasons why many Portuguese, Italians, and others living under the Spanish crown, as well as many French, Italians, and others living outside it, might have sided with England in the Armada crisis or afterward. After all, fear of Habsburg universalism was not unfounded. But, for many, a commitment to the Catholic cause was of central importance, especially when the struggle was seen as so crucial to the future course of the Reformation. By the same token, for many Dutch, Scots, Huguenots, and others, devotion to the Protestant cause lessened some of the animosities that they felt toward the English.

Thus, in spite of often-divergent political and economic interests, religious convictions remained strong and were at the core of the mentality of most early modern people. And therein lies the great paradox: although the Reformation turned much of traditional religion on its head, and despite many other dramatic changes in the early modern period, religious mentalities remained in many ways remarkably tradi-

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tional, especially in terms of the intensity of religious feelings, and this was true for both Catholics and Protestants.

As for the Anglo-Spanish war, extensive fighting, both at sea and especially on land, occurred throughout the 1590's, with many ambitious English and Spanish war plans coming to naught. The long struggle continued beyond the death of Philip II and just beyond the death of Elizabeth I, finally ending in 1604 with a peace treaty between Philip III and James I. Philip II's "messianic imperialism" had convinced him that, in spite of the enormous costs, the war against England, as well as against the Protestant Dutch and Huguenots, had to be pursued to a just end. Elizabeth's own religious and political beliefs convinced her that she, also, had to continue the struggle against the Spanish and Catholic menace. Although the Protestant Queen was not as religiously committed (some have argued not as fanatical) as the Catholic King, she was a reasonably devout Christian (Anglican) and believed, like Philip II, that God was on her side. 85

There certainly were instances in the early modern period where religious beliefs were not the ultimate factor in determining sides in various conflicts. But, in the great battle of the Armada, the lineup was essentially along religious lines, with both Catholics and Protestants hoping that God would bless them with a victory, if not a miracle. And, even after the Armada's defeat, religious loyalties continued to reinforce the determination of many on both sides of the great religious divide to fight on, to continue the crusade for the true faith, even if this sometimes came at the cost of forgoing very tempting political and economic alternatives.
