

Thought for the Day – c. 0723, 9 July 2014 - BBC Radio Scotland

from Alastair McIntosh - Quaker, author and scholar

Good morning.

On TV on Monday night *Robert Peston*, the BBC's economics editor, concluded that the "decisive factor" in the independence referendum might not be whether we're marginally richer or poorer, but that "Scottish people care deeply - about their national identity."¹

However, irrespective of whether we vote Yes or No in September, the religious part of that identity, within existing constitutional law, needs some radical reform. Why? Because it's embarrassingly sectarian.

Much of the 1707 *Union With England Act* has been repealed, but not Section XXV, that deals with what it calls "the true Protestant religion,"² and that bound in with an earlier act of William and Mary clad in language about "popery" that would raise a few eyebrows today.³

If we vote to stay inside the Union such sentiments surely need to be rethought. If, on the other hand, we vote for independence then the Act of Union itself will fall away.⁴

The referendum raises deep implicit questions about church and nation.⁵ Many say they shouldn't mix. Others argue that if we forget God, we lose sight of that higher power by which our politicians and ourselves are measured to account.

Whatever the outcome of this and other debates, both sides agree on the national flag for Scotland – the Saltire or Saint Andrew's Cross – whether inside or outwith the Union Jack.

And whichever way September's vote goes, I rejoice in Saint Andrew's symbolism. Early Christian traditions tell that he died on an X-shaped cross for having persuaded Roman soldiers to disarm, and for championing a woman's right to resist sexual abuse.⁶

History has hailed him as "the most gentle" Andrew,⁷ and that to me is what he means when I survey his cross - within our various flags.

1 *Scotland: For Richer or Poorer*, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer/episode/b049b89z/scotland-for-richer-or-poorer>

2 *Union with England Act 1707*, <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/aosp/1707/7>

3 *1690 Act*, http://www.rps.ac.uk/frameset.php?id=id21034&ctype=trans&filename=william_and_mary_trans

4 *The Scottish Independence Bill*, Constitution S. 35, <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/0045/00452762.pdf>

5 *Scotland's Future*, Q & A Section 590, <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/0043/00439021.pdf>. My reading is that while the 1707 Act would be repealed, mutual duties of the national church and state would continue under S. 6, Articles Declaratory, Church of Scotland Act 1921 <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/Geo5/11-12/29>. In 1986 the General Assembly "dissociated itself" from sectarian clauses in the Confession: <http://goo.gl/BNjfgP>

6 *Saint Andrew*, <http://www.alastairmcintosh.com/articles/2000-theology-in-scotland-andrew.pdf>

7 *The Declaration of Arbroath*, 1320, <http://www.nas.gov.uk/downloads/declarationArbroath.pdf>