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# Religious Tensions in Pre-Confederation Politics

NEIL GREGOR SMITH

**D**URING THE TWENTY-FIVE YEARS before Confederation religious tensions were conspicuous in Canadian politics. Long-standing differences between the French and English races, and between Protestants and Roman Catholics, were aired on the hustings, in the legislature, and in the press. George Brown, who had been personally involved in public affairs in this period, looked back upon it in 1871 as a period in which "religious sects were arrayed against each other, clergymen dragged as combatants into the political arena, religion brought into contempt."<sup>1</sup> The Protestant minority in Canada East and the Roman Catholic minority in Canada West were exhibiting symptoms of hypersensitivity concerning the possible perils of domination by a majority hostile to their interests. The French Roman Catholic majority in Canada East and the British Protestant majority in Canada West were frequently aligned against one another.

In an editorial in March 1858, the *Canadian Presbyterian* lamented that for some time past the two provinces had been involved in an unhappy rivalry. After mentioning some of the issues on which the people of the two provinces were divided the writer went on to say that the basic issue dividing them was the difference in religion:

There is another antagonism far more potent than any we have mentioned existing between the East and West, and which, unless its influence in the action be promptly arrested bids fair to embroil us in serious conflicts for ages. . . . The antagonism to which we refer is that between the Roman Catholicism of the East and the Protestantism of the West. It is evident that in this matter both sections are pulling in opposite directions.<sup>2</sup>

They were not only pulling in opposite directions; their differences frequently issued in acts of open violence. There were occasional riots and numerous acts of vandalism. There were scenes of violence during elections, issuing, in a few tragic instances, in bloodshed and murder. Tumultuous disorders in connection with Orange parades and St. Patrick's Day celebrations were not infrequent. Religious controversies were carried on in the press, from the lecture platform, and from the pulpits.

The debates on Confederation contain numerous references to the religious

1. Reply of George Brown to a Roman Catholic Committee, 9 March 1871, in Alexander Mackenzie, *Life and Speeches of Hon. George Brown* (Toronto: Globe Printing Co., 1882), p. 124.

2. *Canadian Presbyterian*, March, 1858, p. 66.

tensions in the two provinces. One of the members of the Legislative Council voiced sentiments which many felt when he asserted that the new constitution must provide some solution for the religious quarrels which had plagued the provinces in days past:

When we make a Constitution we must, in the first place, settle the political and religious questions which divide the population for whom the Constitution is devised: because it is a well known fact that it is religious differences which have caused the greatest troubles and the greatest difficulties which have agitated the people in days gone by.<sup>3</sup>

In the speeches of those who favoured and those who opposed the plan for Confederation there are numerous references to its possible consequences for the religious situation in the provinces. Along with consideration of the political, economic, and military issues involved, consideration was given to the possible effects of Confederation upon an unhappy religious situation which all recognized as deplorable.

The religious tensions in the Canadian provinces had been potentially dangerous from the first mingling of British Protestants with French Roman Catholics. On the one hand was the fierce determination of the French to maintain their language, their institutions, and their laws. On the other was the assumption on the part of some of the colonial administrators, and most of the British merchants and traders, that it could only be a matter of time until the French were Anglicized.

Relations between the two races were, in the beginning, as cordial as could be reasonably expected. During the debates on Confederation, Thomas D'Arcy McGee cited, as an instance of the goodwill which could exist between the two groups, the Presbyterians of Montreal in 1790 worshipping in the Church of the Recollects, and then, when their own St. Gabriel's Church was completed, presenting the Recollect fathers with a box of candles and a hoghead of Spanish wine. He commented:

Here, on the one hand, are the Recollect fathers giving up one of their own churches to the disciples of John Knox to enable them to worship God after their own manner, and perhaps have a gird at Popery in the meantime, and here, on the other hand, are the grateful Presbyterians presenting to these same Seminary Priests wine and wax tapers in acknowledgment of the use of their church for Presbyterian service. Certainly a more characteristic instance of true tolerance on both sides can hardly be found in the history of any other country.<sup>4</sup>

Instances of such generous tolerance became increasingly rare as time went on. To ensure the loyalty of the French during threats of American aggression in the Revolutionary War and the War of 1812 concessions were made to the French by the colonial authorities. British Protestants made no secret of their resentment at these concessions. The French, on their part, suspected

3. L. Letellier de St. Just, in *Parliamentary Debates on the Subject of the Confederation of the British North American Provinces* (Quebec: Hunter, Rose & Co., 1865), p. 188.

4. Thomas D'Arcy McGee, in *ibid.*, p. 144.

that such concessions as had made to them had been made grudgingly and of necessity. They thought of themselves as surrounded by enemies who despised their culture and who were determined to extirpate their racial identity. The widening breach between the two groups built up the tensions which Lord Durham's Report described as resulting in the warring of two nations within the bosom of a single state.

The legislative union of 1841 did not offer a helpful solution to these racial and religious tensions. In the frequent changes of party alignments the French members were inclined to throw their weight behind any legislation for the advantage of their own group or for the advantage of their co-religionists in the upper province. The party divisions among the Upper Canadians gave the French members a balance of power which they used adroitly. Lord Durham was of the opinion that the French in Canada had always used the representative system of government "for the single purpose of maintaining their nationality against the progressive intrusion of the British race."<sup>5</sup> A more recent observer, Pierre Elliott Trudeau, has suggested that French Canadians have always been inclined to use democracy without really believing in it:

For the mass of the people the words Tory and Grit, Conservative and Liberal, referred neither to political ideals nor to administrative techniques. They were regarded only as meaningless labels affixed to alternatives which permitted the auctioneering of one's support; they had no more meaning than *bleu* or *rouge* which eventually replaced them in popular speech.<sup>6</sup>

This tendency to set light store upon party alignments where any racial or religious issue was involved created a situation in which the Upper Canadians could complain that the French "rule us through our own divisions." The Protestants of both provinces were enraged at the frequency with which a solid phalanx of French and Roman Catholic votes determined the outcome of issues debated in the legislature. They complained that Canada had "struck hands with the Pope," and that at the beck of Roman bishops legislation could be secured to favour one group above others.

Neither double majorities, dual ministries, representation by population, nor any of the other expedients tried or suggested appeared to offer reasonable hope of providing a solution to the difficulties in which the two provinces found themselves involved. At the Reform Convention held in Toronto in November 1859, a resolution was presented calling for the dissolution of the union "as the most simple and efficacious remedy for the administrative evils which flow from the legislative union of Upper and Lower Canada."<sup>7</sup> Oliver Mowat spoke pointedly of the French imposing upon the provinces legislation directed against Upper Canada and in favour of

5. Letter of Lord Durham, 9 August 1938, printed in *Durham Papers* (Ottawa: Public Archives of Canada, 1924), p. 318.

6. Pierre Elliott Trudeau, "Some Obstacles to Democracy in Quebec," in Mason Wade (ed.), *Canadian Dualism: Studies of French-English Relations* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1960), p. 245.

7. C. R. W. Biggar, *Sir Oliver Mowat: A Biographical Sketch* (Toronto: Warwick Brothers & Rutter, 1905), Vol. II, p. 92.

Lower Canada. He suggested that the results were worse than the results of colonial administrations before the achieving of responsible government: "Those who rule us now are of another language, another race, another country, knowing nothing of Upper Canada, with other views, other sympathies, other interests."<sup>8</sup> During this period of the legislative union tempers had become frayed on both sides. A number of factors had combined to aggravate the tensions between French and English, Protestant and Roman Catholic, and these tensions were inevitably reflected in the political and social life of the provinces.

In these days of ecumenical concern, when irenic overtures are being made among the divided branches of Christendom, it is instructive to look back into this troubled period before Confederation when religious passions raged and when adherents of differing religious groups were so often prepared

To prove their doctrine orthodox  
By Apostolic blows and knocks.

It is not pleasant to explore such an area of religious controversy where fanaticism flourished and bigotry abounded. The exploration, however, is not without value for the light it casts upon a formative period of Canadian history and for the explanation it gives of a legacy of bitterness which has frequently tainted public life in Canada.

It is possible to see in this period the operation of a number of factors which worked together to aggravate the religious tensions which existed in the Canadian provinces. Some of these were accidents of history and geography, over which the participants in these controversies had no control. Others were the products of misguided zeal, irrational fears, and the stimulation of native prejudices by the arts of demagogues.

This paper is concerned almost exclusively with factors which operated on the Protestant side to excite religious passions and increase religious tensions. This restriction of scope is not intended to suggest that responsibility for an unhappy situation rested exclusively, or even chiefly, on the side of one race or of one faith. It is simply intended to be an exploration, on one side, of factors which contributed to the engendering of suspicion, distrust, and ill will, which were manifested on both sides.

## I

Among factors from abroad which had a baneful influence upon the uneasy tension which existed between racial and religious groups in Canada first place should probably be given to anti-Roman-Catholic propaganda emanating from militant Protestant groups in the British Isles.

Steps leading up to the passage of the Catholic Emancipation Act of 1829 had aroused the wrath of militant British Protestants. A considerable number of societies were organized between 1806 and 1834 to combat what

8. *Ibid.*, p. 95.

many looked upon as the growing menace of Roman Catholicism. Some of the anti-Roman societies, such as the London Hibernian Society and the Glasgow Society for Promoting the Religious Principles of the Reformation, hoped to undermine Roman Catholicism by converting its adherents, and particularly its Irish adherents, to Protestantism. Others, such as the British Society for Promoting the Principles of the Reformation, endeavoured to protect the British public from Romanism by exposing the errors and evils of Popery. These societies sponsored public meetings and lectures in which they endeavoured to win public support. They issued periodicals, books, and controversial pamphlets underlining the ancient quarrels between Protestants and Roman Catholics. Readers were reminded of the horrors of the Inquisition, the iniquity of clerical celibacy, and the threats of Romanism to British life and liberties. The passage of the Catholic Emancipation Act seemed, to these militant Protestants, an indication that their worst fears were being realized. A little later the appearance of Tractarianism in the Church of England aroused their concern and alarm. They were disposed to look upon the High Church movement as a sinister plot to infect the national church with the errors of Popery and to undermine it from within. The giving of increased government assistance to the Seminary at Maynooth and the re-establishment of the Roman Catholic hierarchy in England appeared to them as acts of Papal aggression. They became bitter in their attacks on Roman Catholicism and all its works, and were disposed to see a plotting Jesuit behind every bush.

British immigrants to Canada carried with them a strong prejudice against Roman Catholicism. British religious journals, to which many of the Canadian clergy subscribed, carried inflammatory articles on the menace of Romanism and reviews of anti-Roman-Catholic books and pamphlets. In the internal quarrels of Protestantism it had long been customary for opponents to hurl charges of Popery against one another as the most damning of accusation. Accustomed to thinking of Roman Catholicism as a gross aberration from the faith once delivered to the saints, British immigrants were startled and dismayed, on coming up the St. Lawrence and landing at Quebec or Montreal, to see the Church of Rome in a dominant position. The biographer of W. C. Burns tells of his coming to Montreal in 1844 and undertaking to preach in the streets of the city.

Lower Canada was then, as it had been for ages, and still is, settled by French Canadians, speaking the French language, and subject to debasing superstition and a dominant priestcraft. The whole land groans under the tyrannical sway of perhaps the most wealthy and powerful hierarchy under the dominion of the see of Rome. We have no doubt that in seeing their splendid palaces, their magnificent cathedrals, colleges, and convents, in seeing this lovely land almost wholly "given to idolatry" the spirit of Mr. Burns was greatly stirred within him.<sup>9</sup>

Newcomers from the British Isles, such as Mr. Burns, were conditioned

9. Islay Burns, *Memoir of the Rev. W. C. Burns* (3rd ed., London: Nisbet, 1870), p. 269.

to believe the worst of a group concerning whose wiles and wickedness they had heard and read so much.

The wide Atlantic was not wide enough to insulate the North American churches from the religious controversies of Europe. At the time of the re-establishment of the Roman Catholic hierarchy in England in 1850 Cardinal Wiseman had issued a pastoral letter which was to be frequently quoted in months to come as being addressed "from out of the Flaminian Gate of Rome." The letter was intended for Roman Catholic readers, and little thought had been given as to how some of its contents could be interpreted by critical Protestants. He expressed his joy that Catholic England was being restored to its orbit in the ecclesiastical firmament from which its light had long vanished, and named the counties which would belong to the jurisdiction of particular sees. The British press, led by *The Times*, denounced the impudence with which an Italian priest had undertaken to parcel out the spiritual dominion of England. The cry of Papal aggression was taken up everywhere. Lord John Russell addressed an open letter to the Bishop of Durham in which he asserted that the papal action in carving up the land into Roman dioceses was inconsistent with the supremacy of the Queen, the rights of English bishops and clergy, and the spiritual independence of the nation. He struck a blow, in passing, at clergy of the national church who were leading their flocks to the precipice of error in encouraging the superstitious use of the sign of the cross, the paying of honour to saints, and the practice of auricular confession.<sup>10</sup> The cry against papal aggression was taken up in Canada. George Brown published the "Flaminian Gate" letter of Cardinal Wiseman in *The Globe* and made extensive comments upon its implications for Canada.<sup>11</sup> The most obvious implication was that, if the citizens of predominantly Protestant England were alarmed at the threat of Papal aggression, Canadians should be even more alarmed when the Roman Catholic Church enjoyed the benefits of an established church in Canada East and exerted a strong influence in the legislature which governed both provinces.

Among the newcomers to Canada, too, were large numbers of Irish, who were already hardened veterans in religious controversy and carried their religious dissensions to Canada with them. The lines of William Butler Yeats describe the temper in which many of the Irish came to this continent:

Out of Ireland have we come:  
Great anger, little room,  
Maimed us at the start.  
I carry from my mother's womb  
A fanatic heart.

The fanatic heart of exiled Irishmen carried to these provinces provocative

10. Part of Cardinal Wiseman's letter is printed in Wildrid Ward, *The Life and Times of Cardinal Wiseman* (London: Longmans, 1898), Vol. 1, pp. 541f. Comment from *The Times* is given in the same volume on pp. 544f., and the text of Lord John Russell's letter to the Bishop of Durham on pp. 547f.

11. Cf. J. C. Dent, *The Last Forty Years* (Toronto: G. Virtue, 1881), Vol. II, pp. 227f: "Mr. Brown returned to the subject in *The Globe*, again and again, and his cue was followed by a considerable section of the Protestant press of the province."

memories of persecutions under Cromwell, the Battle of the Boyne, and bloody feuds between Ribbonmen, White Boys, Blackfeet, Defenders, United Irishmen, and Orangemen. In 1838 Bishop Alexander Macdonald wrote to Lord Durham:

The Irish arrived in this country with their minds under a strong irritation arising from the pressure of tithe exactions, rack-rents in their own country, and above all, their mortal hatred of Orangeism which they find rapidly spreading over this province: they are with great difficulty persuaded that they will meet with justice and fair play in Canada.<sup>12</sup>

Irish immigration to Canada, which had been fairly steady during the 1830's, increased greatly during the 1840's. In 1847, in the aftermath of the potato famine, it is estimated that out of 90,000 immigrants to Canada approximately 70,000 were from Ireland.<sup>13</sup> The coming of these immigrants strengthened the Roman Catholic Church in Canada West and strengthened, at the same time, the Orange Lodges.

## II

In addition to these influences emanating from the British Isles, Canada was exposed, in the same period, to the influence of the Nativist movement in the United States. This movement had early taken an anti-Roman-Catholic direction. The arrival of great numbers of immigrants from Europe had aroused alarm in many sections of the United States. There was a tendency for the newcomers to flood the markets for unskilled labour, and the cry was raised that these foreigners were taking the bread from the mouths of American families. Many of the newcomers were Roman Catholics, and some Americans professed to see in the swelling tide of Roman Catholic immigration a Popish plot to undermine the free institutions of the United States. Samuel F. B. Morse, who is best known as the inventor of the telegraph, published in 1834 a work entitled *Foreign Conspiracy against the Liberties of the United States*. Its argument was that the kings and despots of Europe, unable to vanquish the United States otherwise, had conspired with the Papacy to flood the United States with Roman Catholics who would eventually take over the government and deprive Americans of their cherished liberties. Morse urged Protestants to take a firm stand to check Catholic immigration, to prevent the establishment of Roman Catholic schools, and to prevent the election of Roman Catholics to public office.

A considerable number of anti-Roman-Catholic societies were formed, among them the Society for the Diffusion of Christian Knowledge (1835) and the American Society to Promote the Principles of the Protestant

12. Alexander Macdonnell to Lord Durham, in John George Lambton, First Earl of Durham, *Report on the Affairs of British North America* (ed. C. P. Lucas, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1912), Vol. III, p. 120.

13. Gilbert Tucker, "Famine Immigration to Canada," *American Historical Review*, 36 (1931), 533-48.



Reformation (1836). These societies issued periodicals whose constant theme was the menace of the Church of Rome. They employed lecturers to go about the country soliciting subscriptions and lecturing on the evils of Romanism. To further their cause Native American groups were formed for political action. Because of the reluctance of some of these Nativist groups to give information concerning their organization and membership they came to be known collectively as the "Know Nothings." The chief political objective of these groups was to work for the election to public offices of native American Protestants. In some of the eastern cities of the United States these Nativist groups were astonishingly successful. There were numerous instances in which riots were incited by these groups, and in some instances Roman Catholic churches and convents were attacked and burned.

The activity of these Nativist groups and anti-Roman-Catholic societies encouraged the production of anti-Roman-Catholic books, pamphlets, and periodicals. In addition to the defamatory articles appearing in such anti-Roman publications as *The National Protestant*, the *American Protestant Vindicator*, and *The Downfall of Babylon*, newspapers and magazines carried articles violently antagonistic to Roman Catholicism. Books exposing the evils of Romanism found a ready market. If there can be said to be a classic among books of this sort one claimant for classic status is a work with a Canadian setting, the *Awful Disclosures of Maria Monk*, published in 1836, and professing to give an insider's account of horrible deeds perpetrated in the Hôtel-Dieu, Montreal. This incredible mixture of piety and pornography, believed to have been ghost-written by the Reverend W. K. Hoyt, ran through many editions and many reprintings. The British Museum catalogue lists an edition published in London in the same year as it appeared in the United States. It also lists an edition printed in 1939. It is estimated that three hundred thousand copies of the *Awful Disclosures* had been sold by 1860. The book has been called "the Uncle Tom's Cabin of Know-Nothingism."<sup>14</sup>

A few months after the publication of the *Disclosures* William L. Stone, the Protestant Editor of the *Commercial Advertiser* of New York, obtained permission to go through the Hôtel-Dieu in the company of John Frothingham and Duncan Fisher of Montreal to investigate what was going on in the institution which Maria had represented as a sink of iniquity. He found nothing to corroborate her lurid tale of infants being born to the nuns, and then, after they were baptized, being strangled, smothered, or otherwise disposed of. Cross-examining Maria afterwards, Mr. Stone discovered that Maria did not know the floor plan of the institution in which she claimed to have spent seven years. He was satisfied that she had never been an inmate of it. Further investigation indicated that Maria's only first-hand knowledge of a Roman Catholic institution was obtained in a

14. A good account of the circumstances surrounding the publication of Maria Monk's book is given in Ray Allen Billington, *The Protestant Crusade* (Gloucester, Mass.: Peter Smith, 1963), pp. 99-108.

few months' residence in an institution for the reclamation of prostitutes, and that in her case the process of reclamation had not been completely successful. From the number of nuns in the Hôtel-Dieu at the time Maria was supposed to have been there Mr. Stone calculated that to have given birth to the number of infants which Maria claimed were born and slaughtered, each nun of child-bearing age would have had to give birth to two and a half children each year—a biological feat which Mr. Stone believed would baffle the ingenuity of the most cunning Jesuit. He stated in conclusion:

The result is the most thorough conviction that Maria Monk is an arrant imposter—that she has never been and was never within the cloisters of the Hotel Dieu—and consequently that her disclosures are wholly and unequivocally from beginning to end untrue—either the vagaries of a distempered brain, or a series of calumnies unequalled in the depravity of their invention and unsurpassed in their enormity.<sup>15</sup>

Some came forward to defend the accuracy of Maria's narrative, alleging that Mr. Stone was either "Stone-blind" or a hireling of the Church of Rome. As often happens in such affairs there were more readers for Maria's *Disclosures* than for Mr. Stone's exposures of their falsity. He complained that there were Protestants who would yield "a willing credence to any story against the Roman Catholics, no matter what or by whomsoever related, so that it be sufficiently horrible and revolting in its details of licentiousness and blood."<sup>16</sup> This, and similar publications sponsored by American Nativist and anti-Roman-Catholic societies, circulated in Canada and were read with interest by Canadian Protestants.

All these influences from abroad, from aroused Protestant public opinion in the British Isles, from the Nativist movement and anti-Roman-Catholic societies in the United States, helped to create in Canada a climate of opinion in which religious prejudices flourished. In a review of Cardinal Wiseman's *Recollections of the Four Last Popes* a contributor to the *Canadian Presbyterian* expressed the mood and temper in which Canadian Protestants were now disposed to look upon the activities of the Roman Catholic Church:

There can be no doubt that the eye of Rome is intently fixed upon Britain and the English speaking people of the world. The efforts of the Propaganda are with unflagging perseverance directed towards the maintenance and extension of Popery among these people. Rome sees that they are the governors and arbiters of the world—that they are the great apostles for good or evil—that they are her chief and most-to-be-dreaded antagonists. . . . Therefore Papal art and power are directed evidently to win them to allegiance.<sup>17</sup>

In this temper, and with this attitude, the Protestants of Canada East and Canada West faced a situation in which they had to live with and work with a strong and militant Roman Catholic Church.

15. William L. Stone, *Maria Monk and the Nunnery of the Hotel Dieu* (New York: Howe, 1836), p. 28.

16. *Ibid.*, p. 53.

17. *Canadian Presbyterian*, October, 1858, p. 317.

## III

In addition to these influences from abroad which contributed to the growth of religious dissension in Canada there were factors in the local scene which contributed to the same unhappy ends.

(i) One of these factors was the activity of Protestant missions to the French Canadians, undertaken with the avowed purpose of converting them to Protestantism and delivering them from the errors of Romanism. While these missions were small and were never conspicuously successful, they acted as irritants in the localities where they operated. It was natural that these missions should be carried on by individuals most violently anti-Roman-Catholic in their sentiments. Some of the workers in these missions maintained an attitude of arrogant superiority towards those whom they were endeavouring to evangelize. One of the workers wrote of the French Canadian Roman Catholics in 1836 as being the worst kind of pagans: "These people are in fact the worst kind of pagans: their idolatry, adorned with the name of God and Christ, is hidden from them by the hirelings who hold the truth in unrighteousness.<sup>18</sup> Ill-concealed disdain for Roman Catholicism as a form of idolatry, wholesale accusations concerning the ignorance of priests and their flocks, and such aggressive tactics as setting up rival places of worship across the road or across the street from the parish church aroused understandable resentment on the part of French Roman Catholics.

As early as 1815 the British Wesleyans had employed a French-speaking native of the island of Guernsey as a missionary to the French Canadians. In 1824 came Henri Olivier from Switzerland, followed in the next year by Louis Roussy and Madame Feller. From the work of the latter two came the founding of the Grand Ligne Mission, which, by 1858, was employing five ordained missionaries and three colporteurs, and maintaining schools with an enrolment of 125 pupils. In 1839 an interdenominational mission, designated as the French Canadian Missionary Society, began its work, drawing support from several denominations. It was hoped that eventually a Synod of an indigenous French Reformed Church could be set up. Such a Synod was organized in 1858, but it never had more than ten pastoral charges. In 1878 it was disbanded, and the work was taken over by denominational agencies. The Church of England maintained one church intended to minister to French Canadians; in addition, it operated a school and a training school. The Free Church Synod of the Presbyterians worked through the French Canadian Missionary Society. The Kirk Synod maintained an independent mission, but it was always operated on a small scale, and appears to have received very little support from the rank and file of church members. The Convener of the Committee responsible for this mission reported in 1860 that in the previous year only 34 congregations out of 111 had contributed anything to the French Mission. The total amount of contributions received had been only 348 dollars.

18. Letter of 29 January 1836, quoted in Paul Villard, *Up to the Light: The Story of French Protestantism in Canada* (Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1928), p. 24.

These missions appear to have drawn support from only a minority within the main Protestant churches. It appears, too, that they were never conspicuously successful. The standard explanation for the lack of French Protestant churches was that when French people turned to Protestantism they were ostracized among their own people, moved to other localities, and were absorbed in the English-speaking churches. In regard to the Grand Ligne Mission, for instance, it is stated:

The results of the Grand Ligne Mission cannot be reckoned in terms of present church membership. Many of our young people have, of necessity, attended English schools, have there made friends, and have drifted into English churches. On the other hand persecution and boycott have been the lot of many of the converts, and driven to emigrate they have been a loss to our cause, and deprived of their influence in the community our endeavours have, to that extent been hampered: but they have gone to serve elsewhere, and to share with others the blessings they have received.<sup>19</sup>

When due allowance is made for all those difficulties the fact remains that the Protestant missions among the French achieved small results in return for the efforts and money expended upon them. While they made little impression upon the Roman Catholicism of the lower province they contributed to the creation of illwill between French and English, and between Roman Catholics and Protestants.

(ii) Particularly offensive to the French Roman Catholics was the Protestant sponsorship of the work of ex-priests who, whatever their intentions may have been, played the rôle of apostles of discord.

One of the first of these to appear on the Canadian scene was Alessandro Gavazzi, an ex-priest of Italian origin, who had been involved in the revolution of 1848 and who, after his break with the Roman Catholic Church, lectured extensively in Great Britain and the United States on the evils of Romanism, which he professed to know from the inside. To read Gavazzi's lectures now is to take an excursion into the realm of fanaticism unlimited. Along with familiar diatribes against clerical celibacy, auricular confession, and the horrors of the Inquisition, Gavazzi warned his audiences against the danger of employing Roman Catholic serving maids in their houses and letting Roman Catholics have places in the post-offices. "Remember," he thundered, in exposing the peril of employing Popish servants, "the better they are educated, and the more refined they are, the more fatal they are to your children and to your families."<sup>20</sup>

After lecturing in New York before enormous crowds Gavazzi came to Toronto in 1853, where he addressed large and appreciative audiences on the nights of 30 June and 1 May. He went on to Quebec, where he met a cooler reception. During his attempt to lecture in the city of Quebec an uproar broke out. Gavazzi was assailed in his pulpit and thrown from it among the crowds milling below. On the evening of 8 June he was in Montreal to lecture in Zion Church. A large, hostile crowd gathered.

19. *Ibid.*, p. 75.

20. *Father Gavazzi's Lectures in New York* (3rd ed., New York: DeWitt & Davenport, 1853), p. 291.

Soldiers were called out to quell a potential riot. They fired into the crowd, killing some and wounding others.<sup>21</sup> Leaving a trail of blood in his wake Gavazzi returned to New York, where he complained bitterly of the limitations imposed upon freedom of speech in Canada. Gavazzi's mission in Canada was short, but it was long remembered. A Toronto publisher issued an edition of his lectures, bound with another work entitled *The Trial of Anti-Christ, otherwise the Man of Sin, for High Treason against the Son of God*.<sup>22</sup> When, a few years later, Charles Chiniquy left the Roman Catholic priesthood and began to lecture to French Canadians on the iniquities of Popery he heard angered outcries which linked his name with Judas Iscariot and Alessandro Gavazzi.<sup>23</sup>

The missions of ex-priests of the type of Gavazzi and Chiniquy were of such a character that they could not be expected to accomplish much by way of securing converts from Roman Catholicism. Their speeches and writings were intended to please people who were already convinced of the errors of Romanism. Their diatribes against Roman Catholic faith and practice, and the bitterness of their attacks on Roman Catholic priests and people, were naturally resented by Roman Catholics. Fair-minded Protestants of goodwill found the tactics and speeches of these militant ex-priests offensive. Whatever mixture of motives may have animated these men in their campaigns the most obvious result of their efforts was the creation of discord.

(iii) By far the most active and influential group for political action among Canadian Protestants was the Orange Order, which had been established in Ireland in 1795 and which found fertile soil for its activities in Canada West. Orange societies made an astonishingly early appearance in Canada. As early as 1800 there is a letter of Chief Justice Elmsley giving evidence concerning the existence of an Orange society in Montreal. The Orange Order had apparently been unknown to him before, since he seems to have assumed at the beginning that he was dealing with an organization of the United Irishmen. The information he gleaned about the Orange society in Montreal was that it had numerous members, that it included some of the officers of the 41st Regiment, that its members were bound with secret oaths, and that they were to parade to church with their badges on a specified day in July.<sup>24</sup> Small lodges were established in Irish settlements in the upper province in the 1820's. The first public demonstration is believed to have been a parade held in York in 1822. On this occasion the members of the Order marched through streets decorated with bunting, and afterwards listened to what was described as "an elegant and appropriate discourse" delivered by the Reverend John Strachan.

21. There are numerous accounts of the Gavazzi riots in Quebec and Montreal, and various estimates of the numbers killed or injured in Montreal. A brief summary of the mission of Gavazzi is given in J. C. Dent, *The Last Forty Years*, Vol. II, p. 274.

22. Toronto: Donagh and Brother, 1853.

23. Marcel Trudel, *Chiniquy* (Trois-Rivières, P.Q.: Editions du bien public, 1955), p. 213.

24. J. Elmsley to Lt. Gen. Hunter, 20 November 1800, Elmsley Letter Book, in Toronto Public Library.

The public appearance of the Order sparked enough opposition to set in motion a petition to the legislature asking for the curbing of Orange demonstrations. A bill to outlaw the Order was narrowly defeated by the casting vote of the Speaker. When a similar petition was presented in 1824 the legislature took no action, on these grounds: "That there is neither necessity nor propriety in continuing in this country these Political associations which all their fellow-subjects desire to see abolished, and that in the meantime the others, conscious that they share every privilege of subjects, will learn to treat such Associations with silent disregard."<sup>25</sup> The persistent activity of the Orange Order in public affairs made the attitude of silent disregard difficult to maintain. A Grand Lodge was organized in Brockville in 1830, and from this point on the Order became increasingly active in political affairs. By 1833 there were 102 lodges and the Grand Master, Ogle R. Gowan, was issuing a paper known successively as *The Sentinel* and *The Statesman*. Orangemen were sufficiently organized for political action to be a decisive factor in defeating the Reformers in the elections of 1836.

There continued to be numerous protests against Orange activities and public demonstrations. Some of these protests came from Protestants who deplored the activity of the Order in stirring up religious controversies. In spite of such protests the Order grew and flourished. From the 11,342 members it had in 1833 it grew to have 45,000 members by 1850 and 100,000 by 1860. Some who might not have approved heartily the tactics and methods of the Order welcomed the support which it gave to the maintenance of the British connexion. The fierce loyalty of the Order to the crown was one dependable element in a mixed society where some were lukewarm or indifferent to the maintenance of ties with Britain, and where some openly favoured annexation to the United States. The Order also provided a medium through which the Protestants of Canada West could express their concern for the maintenance of Protestant institutions. One other element which contributed to the growth of the Order was that in a frontier society it offered a welcome means for social fellowship to its members. Desire to mingle with friends and neighbours at socials and dances in the Orange Halls played a part in encouraging membership in the Order. In some instances this may have been stronger than a desire to perpetuate the memory of King William or to wage war on the Papacy.

While the Order numbered in its ranks many men of goodwill, concerned that there should be in Canada "equal rights for all and special privileges for none," it played a disturbing rôle in Canadian politics. The Orange Order never reconciled itself to what has come to be known as "the French fact" in Canada. In regard to the official use of the French language, provision for Separate Schools, and similar issues, it maintained what its members described as an attitude of "honest inflexibility." Its methods of political action appealed to religious prejudices, as may be inferred from the handbill issued during the election of 1864. It asked for every Orange vote to be

25. Quoted in W. Perkins Bull. *From the Boyne to Brampton* (Toronto: George J. McLeod, Ltd., 1936), pp. 67f.

polled against the corrupt ministry headed by the Papist John Sanfield MacDonald whose victory would "place the iron heel of Lower Canadian despotism upon the necks of the British people of Upper Canada."<sup>26</sup> It may be said in extenuation of such political directives that equally explicit directives were issued on the other side. When Thomas D'Arcy McGee was put forward as a candidate for election, the St. Patrick's Society of Montreal laid down two conditions with which he was expected to comply: one, that he should support the demand for Separate Schools for Upper Canada, and two, that he should oppose Orangeism. Just before he was leaving to take his seat in the legislature the *True Witness* reminded him of his obligation towards those who had elected him. He was urged to exert himself "strenuously and unceasingly" to support the claims of the Roman Catholic minority in the upper province: "Do this—and heart and soul we will support you. Fail in this, falter for one moment in your allegiance to the grand and holy cause which we have chosen you to advocate, and you will find us prompt to pull you down as we have been to raise you up."<sup>27</sup> With such determination on both sides to secure political action for religious ends it is not surprising that religious tensions flourished in Canadian politics.

## IV

All these factors working together created a climate of opinion in the Canadian provinces in which suspicion, distrust, and illwill between Protestants and Roman Catholics, and French and English, grew to alarming proportions. As an instance of the mood and temper of the times one may note the almost hysterical reaction among the Protestants in Canada West when a meeting of the Irish Immigrant Aid Society was held in Buffalo in February 1856. Some of the leaders of Irish communities in the United States were distressed that so many of their countrymen had congregated in some of the cities of the eastern coast where they had little prospect of employment except as casual labourers. They proposed that efforts should be made to settle Irish families on vacant lands in Canada, and the meeting in Buffalo was called to consider this proposal. *The Globe* immediately raised the cry that this Irish colonization project was "a deep scheme of Romish priestcraft to colonize Upper Canada with Papists, . . . a movement to swamp the Protestantism of Canada by bringing into the Province eight hundred thousand unenlightened and bigoted Romanists."<sup>28</sup> In a situation in which the most innocent and benevolent proposal could be interpreted as the dark and sinister design of an unrelenting enemy, the Canadian provinces had drifted into a state of deadlock in which they were, as the *Canadian Presbyterian* said, pulling in opposite directions.

The proposal of a confederation of all the provinces of British North America, in a union which the provinces would be given autonomy in

26. Handbill in Ontario Archives, Toronto.

27. Quoted in Isabel Skelton, *The Life of Thomas D'Arcy McGee* (Gardenvale, P.Q.: Garden City Press, 1925), p. 333.

28. *Ibid.*, p. 276.

local and domestic affairs, appeared to offer the only feasible means of preventing a dissolution of the union. The proposed plan of confederation was represented as a happy medium, combining the strength of a legislative union with the sectional freedom of a federal union, and ample protection for all local interests. George-Etienne Cartier saw the plan of confederation as holding out the possibility of a new nationality in a union in which French and English, Protestant and Roman Catholic, would work together for the common good.

Opponents of Confederation questioned the possibility of its providing "ample protection for all local interests." The *Montreal Witness*, the organ of the Protestants, was saying: "Think twice what you are doing, you Protestants of Lower Canada! The local government will swallow you up!" Its opposite number, the *True Witness*, was saying: "Take care of yourselves, you French Canadians of the Catholic Church! If the plan of Confederation is sanctioned by the Legislature you will disappear like a dream: the hydra of the central government will poison you with its pestiferous breath!"<sup>29</sup> Opponents of Confederation feared that its coming would aggravate a situation already dangerous: "It would be constant warfare, and this new Constitution, instead of bringing peace to the country, instead of removing jealousies and heart-burnings, would have the very opposite effect. . . . You are not bringing peace, but a sword!"<sup>30</sup> The fear of the French, as voiced by Joseph Perrault, was that their language, their institutions, and their laws would still be in peril: "We have seen colonial fanaticism attacking our institutions, our language and our laws, and we have seen that our annihilation as a race has been the evident object of these constant efforts. Can we today believe that the case is otherwise: and ought not the unanimity of the English element in favour of Confederation to fill us with terror?"<sup>31</sup>

Neither the best hopes of the advocates of Confederation nor the worst fears of its opponents have been realized in the century that has passed. The religious strife which was supposed to end in 1867 flared up again in 1870 when Thomas Scott, who by an ill chance happened to have been an Orangeman, was executed by the provisional government of Louis Riel. It raged during the controversy over an amnesty for Riel and during the more violent controversy over the execution of Riel. Agitation over the Manitoba School question, over the Jesuit Estates Act, and similar issues, kept green wounds that might otherwise have healed. The union formed in the Confederation of 1867 has survived the strains and tensions of a century, but it has never quite fulfilled the optimistic expectations of those who hoped that it would be a union in which brothers would dwell together in concord.

29. A. C. Harwood, in *Parliamentary Debates on the Subject of the Confederation of the British North American Provinces*, p. 834.

30. James O'Halloran, in *ibid.*, p. 795.

31. Joseph Perrault, in *ibid.*, p. 621.