

Protestant Reaction in Upper Canada to the “Popish Threat”

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While it would seem to serve no object to revive the rancours of religious enmities, now happily in great measure forgotten, nevertheless it is not possible to understand important elements in Canadian political history without studying the religious attitudes of the settlers in this province. Religion in the first half of the nineteenth century played a role in political agitation hardly to be imagined today and it must, therefore, be considered a serious oversight for historians to neglect the significance of the popular religious literature of the period.

Protestant thought in Upper Canada is influenced directly by three major factors. In the first place it is a reflection of the exciting intellectual and religious stirrings in Great Britain; secondly it displays a worried consciousness of the large and increasing French Catholic population in Lower Canada, and finally there is that element which so aroused Protestantism in the United States: a growing Catholic immigration, mostly Irish, which meant an extension of Catholic churches and convents in Protestant areas and the eventual fury of the separate school controversy. The nativist and Know Nothing movements in the United States have a counterpart in the political activities of the Orange Order in Upper Canada.

It is not my intention in this paper to review the more widely publicised aspects of the disputes in Upper Canada, such as the Catholic school question in the 1850's and the Gavazzi riots in 1853. On the contrary I shall present the lesser-known Protestant views of the Roman Catholic Church which I have gleaned from an examination of Protestant periodicals available in the Toronto Public Library. Although obviously far more detailed research and considerably more space would be required for an adequate handling of a topic so broad, yet it is hoped that this cursory survey will be of use in bringing to the fore problems which may be of interest to the Catholic historian.

The sensitivity of Upper Canadian opinion to developments in Great Britain is to be expected, and it is entertaining to view these events as seen through colonial eyes. It should be remembered that the religious revival, which very roughly coincides with romanticism and the struggle against revolutionary France and against liberal secularism, was by no means confined to a narrow minority within the more soulful of the intellectuals nor to the more enthusiastic of Methodist factory hands. Without doubting the “widespread irreligion” with which the masses are accused in every age, without denying the predilection for paganism among the restless in the upper classes and even without blinding

ourselves to the avaricious hypocrisy or to the benign, utilitarian rationalism on the part of the vigorous middle class, it is still evident from reading contemporary sources that religious opinion was a motive so strong in the lives of men and in the actions of governments that in the problem of historical causality it shares a proud place with economic urges.

If Protestant magazines in Britain were concerned with the implications of Catholic emancipation in 1829 and with the recurring unrest in Ireland, so too were Protestants in the colonies. The agitation in 1845 over the Maynooth endowment was not overlooked here, and the ‘papal aggression’ of 1850 which saw the appointment of Dr. Nicholas Wiseman as Cardinal Archbishop of Westminster, was regarded by many Protestant writers here as a dreadful symbol of Roman Catholic plans for world domination. Most alarming of all, many Protestants felt, was the Tractarian Movement within the Church of England, in which some saw Jesuitism in its most insidious function. Dr. Edward Pusey and his associates during the 1830’s and 40’s received constant drubbings, and the eventual adherence to Rome by John Henry Newman and his distinguished followers was regarded as the logical termination for weak-minded and evilly-disposed men.

The Protestant press in Upper Canada does not always provide pleasant reading. At the same time, however, we should not allow ourselves the luxury of righteous indignation over the publication of an absurd picture of Catholic doctrine and practices without appreciating the positive aspects of Protestant thought during this period. The contributions made by the genuine and edifying piety of the Wesleyans and Presbyterians outside the Church of England and the Evangelicals and High Churchmen within that body are part of an inheritance which we all enjoy. We may deplore the distorted view which so many Protestant writers held of the Church of Rome, but it is only right to acknowledge that the damning of the Pope played a minor role in Upper Canadian periodicals; the larger portion of the columns in Protestant magazines here were devoted to positive expositions of Christian belief. And it is consoling to realise that the alarms sounded at the present time by a Mr. Blanchard or by certain extremists in our own country are insignificant as compared with the anti-Catholic effusions of a hundred years ago.

In an age which demanded less originality from its publishers, periodicals were composed in large measure of clippings from other journals. Protestant magazines here contained, therefore, many articles from British papers which reported anti-Catholic meetings in England in which Catholic theology was misrepresented; reprints of nasty little poems in which Catholics were said to have been obliged to “buy” absolution, or, more often, news stories of the many alleged “conversions” of Catholics to the true Protestant faith, or, at times, stories of the regrettable “perversions to Romanism.” Writings and addresses of apostate priests were given a wide circulation.

On the one hand we are told that the day of Roman tyranny is drawing to a close. With the spread of the Scriptures in Ireland, Spain, southern Germany and

Italy, people are beginning at last to walk in the light, as Protestantism joins with liberalism to destroy the common enemy. On the other hand, somewhat inconsistently, the Pope is spreading treacherous forces everywhere, but most noticeably in the Protestant strongholds of England and America. It is, then, of consequence that Protestants awaken to the threat if they wish to avoid repetitions of the Spanish Inquisition or the Marian executions.

Such was the view expressed by someone calling herself “Caroline,” who offered the following verse to the public in the August, 1854, issue of the Toronto Methodist magazine *The Cottager's Friend, and Guide of the Young*:

Popery

O Antichrist, thou art a fearful thing!
What desolation in thy track appears!
What records foul and stain'd can memory bring, –
Of blood, and death, and wounds, and groans, and tears,
Wrought by thy ruthless sway through slow-revolving years!¹

The term “Antichrist” was used commonly here as elsewhere to denote the Roman Church and, more specifically, the Pope. *The Canadian United Presbyterian Magazine* published in Toronto in May, 1856, contains a serious article discussing the exact date when the Pontiff would fall so that the Revelation prophecy of the fall of the “wild beast” Antichrist would take place. The anonymous contributor suggests the year 2000 AD as the most probable date.²

In similar vein, the same magazine in 1855 declared that the promulgation of the dogma of the Immaculate Conception might put an end to the “coquetry of Semi-Protestants with the mother of Harlots.”³ Fifteen years earlier another Presbyterian magazine published at Niagara, in a horrified rejection of any possibility of the use of Catholic externals in church building, told its readers that: “Protestants ought not to have crosses in their places of worship... the cross is the *sign of the beast*, the *armorial bearings* of Popish Rome. Surely all good Protestants ought to avoid *the badge* of that corrupt and persecuting church.”⁴

“Semi-heathenish” was the expression used to describe the Catholic Church by the *Wesleyan Methodist Magazine of Canada*, published in Toronto, 1862:

¹ *The Cottager's Friend, and Guide of the Young*. vol. 1, No. 7, August, 1854, p. 168.

² *The Canadian United Presbyterian Magazine*, Toronto, vol. 3, No. 5, May 1, 1856, p. 97.

³ *Ibid.* vol. 2, No. 4, April 1, 1855, p. 126.

⁴ *The Canadian Christian Examiner, and Presbyterian Magazine*, Niagara, vol. 4, No. 5, May, 1840, p. 139.

The decay and languishing condition of Romanism is one of the present signs which betoken its semi-heathenish character. It, too, is going the way of all the earth. The nations that have long bowed to its sway, under its dogmatic pretensions to a Divine authority, are beginning to wake up to a sense of its impious impositions and pernicious results.⁵

Far stronger was an article by James Douglas printed in *The Wesleyan*, Toronto, 1842. Here Catholics as a body are treated rather roughly:

instead of the true church, which is a spiritual body with Christ for its head, Popery is but a putrifying and noisome carcass – a collection of unregenerate men, the doers of every evil work with those who love and those who make a lie, with the Pope, not the Saviour, for their head.⁶

In one unusual article the Pope is obliged to share his office as the embodiment of all iniquity with such unlooked-for companions as American democracy and free trade. *The Canadian Quarterly Review and Family Magazine* edited at Hamilton in April, 1866, by George D. Griffin, has this to say of society in the United States:

St. John, (Rev. 16, 13) further describes the threefold source of all their wickedness, under the type of three unclean spirits. The first emanating from the *dragon*, that is, *republicanism* or false principles of government in church and state, a bottomless pit of themselves. The second from the *beast* or Roman Catholic church, because the Pope or head and the priests thereof not only profess to forgive sins against God and man, but to be authorised to sell for money Indulgences to commit sins against God and man, they are therefore messengers of the bottomless pit.

The third unclean spirit is out of the mouth of *the false prophets* and includes all those who teach the infidel doctrines of free governments, free trade and free thinking, and say that there is no God, or that God has ceased to take note of or to control the nations of the earth.⁷

Often, however, Roman Catholicism was isolated in its position as scapegoat. Protestant periodicals, while sometimes denouncing heavy drinking in England, tended to forget the misery of agricultural and industrial classes in the United Kingdom as they contrasted the poverty of Roman Catholic countries with the pretended enlightenment and prosperity in Protestant lands. Ireland in particular was the concern of Protestant writers, who thought that only the mass rejection of Catholicism in favour of Protestantism could revive that unhappy

⁵ *Wesleyan Methodist Magazine of Canada*, Toronto, vol. 1, July, 1862, p. 241.

⁶ *The Wesleyan*, Toronto, vol. 2, No. 16, April 20, 1842, p. 121.

⁷ *The Canadian Quarterly Review and Family Magazine*, Hamilton, vol. 2, No. 4, April, 1866, p. 455.

island. *The Ecclesiastical and Missionary Record for the Presbyterian Church of Canada*, published at Streetsville, in March, 1848, contained this appealing passage from the *English Presbyterian Messenger*:

O Ireland! haSt thou never heard that “righteousness exalteth a nation,” and that “godliness is profitable for all things?” Whereas Popery is damnable for all things, both for this life and that which is to come. The Gospel alone can remedy what coercion bills, and poordaws, and railroads, and tenant right, and repeal, and all outward institutions and measures, never can reach, the moral degradation and mental prostration of Ireland, through the curse of Popery, with its degrading idolatry and corrupting priesthood. Popery, body-debasing and soul-destroying Popery, is the root of Ireland’s misery.⁸

To give empirical evidence to support this attitude, it was common to print statistics to prove that serious crimes were committed in a higher ratio in Catholic countries than in Protestant areas.⁹ There is little recognition granted to Catholic culture; a picture is drawn of priest-ridden provinces where crime accompanies illiteracy and commercial stagnation. It is a grotesque view, but it is one portrayed with such frequency that it must have been a basic assumption in the thinking of the average Upper Canadian Protestant. An explanation of Catholic degeneracy given in *The Canadian United Presbyterian Magazine*, Toronto, 1856, is typical. Here the Catholic clergy are exposed as men with “an inveterate enmity against the liberal education of the people... because general knowledge has ever been fatal to their unrighteous claims, and to their anti-Christian impositions.” Therefore, the article continues, “in those fine countries ... where Popery is dominant, the people, with some exceptions, in connexion with the profession of Protestantism, remain in debasing ignorance, involved in degrading superstition, as they are not possessed of the Holy Scriptures, nor permitted to hear the preaching of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.”¹⁰

Such was the customary bent of much of Protestant writing throughout the whole history of Upper Canada and Canada and Canada West. For example in 1840 *The Canadian Christian Examiner, and Presbyterian Magazine* used this language to warn of the activities of Catholic priests: “For certain very important ends, important to them, they have sunk the minds of men into the grossest ignorance, and have turned religion into show and fancy ... Within the circle which the priest draws, the intellect and the heart cannot enter.”¹¹

⁸ *The Ecclesiastical and Missionary Record, for the Presbyterian Church of Canada*, Streetsville, vol. 4, No. 5, March, 1848, p. 75.

⁹ For example, see *The Gospel Tribune*, Toronto, vol. 1, No. 3, July, 1854, p. 83.

¹⁰ *The Canadian United Presbyterian Magazine*, vol. 3, No. 11, Nov. 1, 1856, pp. 345, 346.

¹¹ *The Canadian Christian Examiner, and Presbyterian Magazine*, vol. 4, No. 5, May, 1840, p. 141.

Rome was shown as enclosing vast sections of the earth in darkness which could be brightened only by the light of the Scriptures. Consequently the Pope was terrified of the possibility of Catholics reading the Bible for it was thought that Bible reading would mean almost instantaneous conversion to evangelical Christianity. *The Canada Evangelist*, independent Presbyterian magazine printed in Amherstburg in 1853, gave the following report of a speech by a Rev. Dr. Murray before the New York Bible Society:

He believed the Pope of Rome would rather have a hundred guns of France turned against the Vatican than to have a hundred Bibles sent to Rome.. There was nothing so much hated in some quarters as the Bible.
... If there was a system of idolatry to be found in the world, it was in Romanism... The only remedy was the Bible.¹²

Propaganda of this nature was not confined to adults. Sunday school papers and sections in adult magazines for children told in form of story or poetry how fortunate children were to be living in a land free from popish tyranny, where they were allowed to read the Bible. The above Amherstburg magazine in 1851 offered a tear-provoking story of *Little Ellen*, a popish child in rural Ireland who attended a Protestant Sabbath school and was presented with a copy of the Scriptures. Her joy was short-lived, however, for:

The priest soon called for her, and, in an angry tone, asked her how she dared to read a book forbidden by the Church; and demanded that the Bible be brought to him. Ellen produced the Bible, when he snatched it out of her hand, and cast it into the fire ...

The story contained a lesson for children in Canada West:

Now, dear Children, while you pity poor Ellen who was thus cruelly treated by the priest, be thankful to God for your privileges, – seek to profit by them yourselves, and try to extend them to those who, like little Ellen, are not permitted to ‘search the scriptures,’ and thus learn God’s great love for sinners.¹³

It is not surprising that many Protestants felt concerned over the souls of their fellow Canadians in Lower Canada. In 1839 *The Canadian Christian Examiner, and Presbyterian Magazine* called the attention of Protestants in Upper Canada to the “benighted inhabitants of Lower Canada” who were “still the blinded votaries of ‘the man of sin’.” The political and religious influence of French Canadian Catholicism should be attacked at its heart, by sending missionaries to those unhappy people who, in “gross ignorance’ were suffering

¹² *The Canada Evangelist*, Amherstburg, vol. 3, No. 2, Feb., 1853, p. 23.

¹³ *Ibid*, vol. 1, No. 8, August, 1851, p. 125.

from “the universal corruptions of Popery.”¹⁴ Several religious papers after this date report missionary activity among the French, but these combine a remarkable combination of optimism for the future with modesty of achievement for the present.

According to *The Wesleyan* of November 3rd, 1841, several denominations had joined in supporting a French Canadian mission in Montreal which aimed at ‘the circulation of the Word of God and the spread of true vital godliness among the French Canadians.’¹⁵ In December, 1855, *The Canadian Ecclesiastical Gazette*, printed in Toronto, reported that the Church of England French Canadian mission was finally in full operation. It admitted there was some difficulty in obtaining French-speaking missionaries, but hoped that English-speaking students would be trained for this work.¹⁶

Presbyterians seemed to have lead the other Protestant denominations in their desire to convert French Canada, although they had but moderate success to report. *The Ecclesiastical and Missionary Record, for the Presbyterian Church of Canada*, in 1857, describes the means employed by the French Canadian Missionary Society as follows:

- 1st – Circulation of the Scriptures and Religious Tracts by Colporteurs, and the systematic visitation of the people by Scripture readers and Catechists.
- 2nd – Preaching the Gospel by Ministers and Evangelists.
- 3rd – Education of the young, through the Institutes at Pointe aux Trembles, and schools scattered over the country.¹⁷

An editorial in the same periodical in 1861 shows the political significance attached by Presbyterian hopes for the Missionary Society:

If liberally supported, the Society might indefinitely extend its operations, and in a, few years undermine the power of Rome in Canada. This would be of the greatest importance even to its commercial and political bearing, the great hindrance to the welfare of the country being the influence of Romanism.¹⁸

The belief that Roman Catholicism in Canada represented an hostile element politically was not exceptional. While Church of England writers were less inclined than evangelical Protestants to describe the Pope as “The Man of

¹⁴ *The Canadian Christian Examiner, and Presbyterian Magazine*, vol. 3, No. 6, June, 1839, pp. 164, 165.

¹⁵ *The Wesleyan*, vol. 2, No. 4, Toronto, November 3, 1841, p. 28.

¹⁶ *The Canadian Ecclesiastical Gazette*, Toronto, vol. 2, No. 12, December, 1855, p. 92.

¹⁷ *The Ecclesiastical and Missionary Record, for the Presbyterian Church of Canada*, vol. 14, No. 9, July, 1857, p. 134.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, vol. 17, No. 11, September, 1861, p. 163.

Sin” or as ‘Antichrist,” nevertheless it was felt that Catholicism might be inconsistent with loyalty. When in 1826 Archdeacon John Strachan, later first Church of England Bishop of Toronto, appealed for support of the Church of England as a bulwark against “Sectaries” on the one hand and the “Romish Church” on the other,¹⁹ he was voicing an attitude which he and his followers held consistently. An admirer of Strachan, the Rev. A.W.H. Rose, in 1849 wrote a book describing his visit to Upper Canada, in which he expressed apprehension over the fact that Roman Catholics would be numbered among the Irish immigrants:

Of course it must be expected, that amongst the Irish there would be a considerable proportion of members of the Romish communion; but that, I suppose, is an unavoidable circumstance, which must ever connect itself with emigration on anything of a large scale from Ireland. In any case, they would probably be better placed on a railway, where they would be subject to organization, control, and admixture, than set down in the mass in some part of the country by themselves.²⁰

A more extreme view was given in 1859 by someone who sent a letter to *The Canadian Ecclesiastical Gazette*, in which he charged that:

Rome fights against Gospel light as well as civil liberty – against the welfare of the immortal soul, as well as the progress of human civilization; and every shilling given to her by a churchman is an act of treason to his own Mother – an aid to those who would undermine the British Constitution as well as the British altar.²¹

Similarly the Roman Catholic was likened to the “infidel” and the ‘profane” by a Church of England magazine, *The Young Churchman*, published in Toronto in 1851. Number eleven of an article on “Thirteen Good Reasons for Being a Churchman” reads:

I AM A CHURCHMAN – Because I find that the Establishment excites the bitterest enmity, and endures the fiercest assaults of the Papist, the Socinian, the Infidel, the lawless, and the profane. I cannot believe that she can be bad since they hate her so much; for their hatred is the best testimony in her favour.

¹⁹ J. G. Hodgins (ed), *Documentary History of Education in Upper Canada, from the Passing of the Constitutional Act of 1791 to the Close of Rev. Dr. Ryerson’s Administration of the Education Department in 1876*, Toronto, 1894 - 1910, (28 vols.), vol. 1, p. 219.

²⁰ A. W. H. Rose, *The Emigrant Churchman in Canada*, by A Pioneer of the the Wilderness, Edited by Rev. Henry Christmas, (2 vols. in 1 vol.), London, 1849, p. 280.

²¹ *The Canadian Ecclesiastical Gazette*, vol. 7, No. 3, February 1, 1860, p. 19.

Whatsoever is of God has, in all times, been hated and railed at by wicked men and heretics.²²

Even Church of England members who were under the influence of the Oxford Movement felt disposed to attack Rome. Although it is envious of many aspects of Roman Catholic practices, *The Churchman's Friend*, an Anglo-Catholic Church of England magazine printed in Windsor in 1856, maintains that Popery tends “to foster every religious error, to which the sins or infirmities of Christians lead them.”²³

Church of England verbal opposition to Roman Catholicism was to an extent in answer to evangelical Protestants who were determined to protest against Catholic practices entering “through the back-door” of Anglo-Catholicism. In 1842 *The Wesleyan* regretted the sympathy shown in Canada and the United States to the Tractarian movement. “Masked popery,” it felt, was not to be preferred to “barefaced popery,” and therefore “Let every man be on his guard, both in reading and hearing, that the poison of Popery does not steal into his heart.”²⁴ Likewise, in 1851, the *Christian Observer*, a Toronto Baptist journal, turned its ire against Tractarian tendencies within the Church of England, and used this as another argument against state support of religion:

We have abundant evidence that Puseyism is spreading in this colony. The senseless mummeries practised under the name of Religion! – the wearing of gowns and bands in the streets, for the avowed purpose of gratifying the mental tendencies of the Episcopal Bishop! – the open advocacy, alike by the pulpit and the press, of that ruinous fallacy, baptismal regeneration! – all testify as to the leanings of the Anglican clergy in this Province. We need no Acts of Parliament here, however, to set us right – no Instructions on such matters from the throne. Leave us open Bibles, and an unfettered press – let us have no State churches, parsons, nor parsonages, and we will demonstrate to the world, that true religion in Canada can take care of itself.²⁵

The “disguised popery” of the Oxford Movement was but one of the many reasons why Protestants felt they must be alerted. A meeting of Toronto Presbyterians in 1851 passed resolutions condemning the 1850 “papal aggression,” calling it “a direct invasion of the Queen’s civil supremacy; unparalleled since the days of the persecuting Queen Mary.” Roman Catholic moves were not to be regarded with indifference, they said, for: “Regarding Popery as at once a system of religious error, and as a scheme of ecclesiastical despotism, we cannot but look with serious apprehension on every fresh effort

²² *The Young Churchman*, Toronto, vol. 1, No. 3, February 15, 1851, p. 24.

²³ *The Churchman's Friend*, Windsor, vol. 1, No. 12, September, 1856, p. 171.

²⁴ *The Wesleyan*, vol. 2, No. 12, February 23, 1842, p. 92.

²⁵ *Christian Observer*, Toronto, vol. 1, No. 5, May, 1851, p. 73.

put forth by its abettors to retain ascendancy in Protestant lands.” Turning to Canada, the Presbyterians announced they were disturbed that the Catholic Church was in receipt of public assistance:

We look upon the civil establishment of Popery in Lower Canada; the ample endowments of the Popish Hierarchy in that part of our Province; and the pertinacious claims of the priesthood to the repossession of the “Jesuit’s Estates”; as grounds of just alarm, in connection with the ascendancy of a system dangerous at once to the civil and religious liberties of mankind, and as calling loudly on the Legislature to change the character of their public policy; to withdraw long encouragement and countenance given to the system of Popery, and steadily to withhold all enactments of a public nature, designed to afford facilities for the aggrandizement of a priestly power, dangerous to the state.²⁶

When the prevalence of such views is considered, it is not surprising that separate schools became, in the 1850’s, a bitter political issue. To be sure, the religious question has not long been absent from Canadian politics. The struggle between the Orange Lodge and the Catholic settlers is too large a topic for this paper, but the influence of the Orange group as a spearhead of political action should be kept in mind. For instance, in the course of an address in London, Canada West, that leading Orangeman Mr. Ogle R. Gowan in 1858 told the audience in the Orange Hall that they had done well in returning “good, sound, honest, loyal Protestants” to Parliament, and that the Orange order in particular deserved support because such scenes of violence as the Gavazzi riots in Montreal and Quebec “would become more general were not the Catholics kept in check by the members of the Orange body...”²⁷

That a basic reason for adherence of the British minority in Lower Canada to monarchical institutions and its opposition to popular democracy was fear of the French Catholic majority is obvious. What perhaps is not so well known is that this same fear played a part in the attitude even of moderates in Upper Canada. An article in the *Christian Guardian* on April 29, 1835, Toronto Methodist journal edited by Rev. Egerton Ryerson, attacks the Reformers in Upper Canada for seeking an alliance with Papineau’s French popular party. Ryerson deplores the possibility of the introduction of “American democracy” into these colonies:

... it appears evident beyond a doubt, that the introduction of the institutions of the United States into Lower Canada is advocated because it will place the supreme power into the hands of the *Catholic* majority. In case of

²⁶ *The Ecclesiastical and Missionary Record, for the Presbyterian Church of Canada*, vol. 7, No. 5, March, 1851, p. 68.

²⁷ *The London Free Press and Western Advertiser*, London, January 27, 1858.

independence or elective institutions, the Catholics would constitute the numerical majority of both Provinces, – and then comes the reign of Popery! ... we leave the *Protestant* and *Christian* reader to judge what would be the fate of our Protestant fellow subjects in Lower Canada, should popery obtain the helm of Government, and what might not yet be the fate of the Protestants in this Province also? – We say, let Catholics have equal protection with Protestants; (though we are not ignorant of or indifferent to the character and objects of Popery;) yet let the supreme power be *Protestant*. Protestantism does not wade to the throne in blood, nor is its reign a *Mary* sway of fire and faggot, of the dungeon and the sword. Had it been so, popery would not enjoy the equal protection it does in these Colonies, and – with shame we say it – the *support* in some instances.²⁸

Ryerson was answered in a letter by a person signing himself “An Irish Catholic,” who joined Ryerson in denouncing democracy, but denied that Catholics as a body were interested in the democratic cause:

But let me tell Mr. Ryerson that the points at issue are not between Protestant and Catholic; but simply whether the old, rotten, and baneful system of French laws and institutions shall continue, and French democrats domineer in the land to the detriment of every subject of British birth, or of British origin ... Let me assure Mr. Ryerson that the Irish Catholics entertain e just sense of the wisdom, liberality, and paternal care of the British Government, and that they will never be found aiding the treasonable views of unprincipled factions whether in the Lower or Upper Province.²⁹

In response, Ryerson was thankful that he might have been mistaken in assuming that Catholics as a whole were behind Papineau,³⁰ and that in any event the Methodists wanted Catholics to enjoy all privileges, civil and religious, along with other classes of the population. It was their belief, he said, that “our only weapons against what we consider to be the gross and injurious errors of popery, are *truth* and *reason*.”³¹

Likewise the attitude of most Protestant periodicals was that Roman Catholics were to be tolerated in their worship, but that they should receive no public support for priests or for education. While the *Wesleyan Methodist Magazine of Canada*, published in Toronto, July, 1862, in an article on Popery urged that Protestants “sweep this God-dishonouring and soul-destroying delusion from the earth,”³² there is no hint that force should be used. In an editorial denouncing the Roman Catholic separate school agitation, *The*

²⁸ *Christian Guardian*, Toronto, vol. 6, No. 25, April 29, 1835, p. 98.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, vol. 6, No. 27, May 13, 1835, p. 106.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, vol. 6, No. 26, May 6, 1835, p. 103.

³¹ *Ibid.*, vol. 6, No. 27, May 13, 1835, p. 106.

³² *Wesleyan Methodist Magazine of Canada*, Toronto, vol. 1, July, 1862, p. 245.

Ecclesiastical and Missionary Record for the Presbyterian Church of Canada in August, 1855, discusses at length the steps that Protestants must take to combat aggressive Catholicism in Canada West. Protestants, it was asserted, must answer the attack first by stimulating the circulation of the Bible, and secondly by electing strong Protestants to defeat popery in the Legislature.³³ This same magazine in 1849 opposed the policy of the British government in providing financial assistance for Catholic priests. It would be far less destructive, the magazine asserted, for the government to distribute poison “in some palatable and subtle form” than for it to endow the priests of Rome, “for the doctrine which they teach, have a poison deadly to the immortal spirit.”³⁴

Keeping such an attitude in mind, the reason for Presbyterian insistence on the Bible in common schools becomes more evident, as does the general Protestant reaction to the Catholic attempt to obtain tax support for Catholic schools. The picture of the Catholic Church drawn in Protestant publications was so distorted and the atmosphere of fear thus generated so constant, it was to be expected that ‘no popery’ would feature Canadian election contests.

As might be supposed, the Catholics in Upper Canada, composed mostly of poor Irish and Scotch immigrants, with a few scattered German and French settlements, with scant means of education and with pitifully few priests, were not in a position to give adequate answer to the anti-Catholic press. However on October 22nd, 1832, there was published in Kingston the first issue of a weekly paper edited by Rev. William P. MacDonald, Vicar General. This paper, entitled *The Catholic* appeared until October 14th, 1833, when it ceased because of lack of paying subscribers. Ten years later Father MacDonald published the paper again, at Hamilton, and it lasted until 1844.

The Catholic deserved a more determined support than it received. Each issue contained able articles explaining the Catholic faith and articles answering such wild charges as the sales of indulgences or the adoration of images. The first issue, for example, presented lengthy articles on the Mass, the Real Presence and the Bible. The second issue has articles on Mysteries, on the importance of the faculty of reason, and an article denying that Catholics believe all non-Catholics are damned. Besides offering serious studies of Catholic doctrine, Father MacDonald took care to point out that the government had hardly favoured the Catholics in Upper Canada, that Protestant countries had frequently persecuted Catholics, and that Protestant press accounts of conversions to Protestantism and of Catholic “degradation” were not documented. He by no means conducted controversy by using mild, polite detachment.

Here is an example of Father MacDonald’s approach. In an article on

³³ *The Ecclesiastical and Missionary Record, for the Presbyterian Church of Canada*, vol. 11, No. 10, August, 1855, p. 154.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, vol. 5. No. 11. Toronto. September. 1849. n. 169.

March 18, 1831, headed EVANGELICAL PREVARICATION! he proceeds to denounce a Protestant compatriot:

The Watchman is hereby called upon to retract the *notorious falsehood* which he has dared to insert in his pious miscellany of slander, viz. That Catholics give to their supreme pastor, so blasphemous a title as OUR LORD GOD THE POPE. O for shame, thou godly impostor! It was no printing mistake, the insertion of the word God into the Pope's title. No. The man knew the gross ignorance of his subscribers; and for such he would venture, at the expense of honour, honesty and truth, to throw in a word that was sure to scandalize their simple and credulous minds; and fire them with holy indignation at this fresh instance of popish idolatry. Is not this really scattering abroad the dark blinding & hate-kindling fire of the abyss; the very opposite of the enlightening & hearteoothing fire of charity... Shew such an expression, as *Our Lord God the Pope*, to have ever been used by any Catholic on earth: or else stand convicted a *wilful slanderer* before the independent public. And for such concocted villany there are those, who can subscribe, and pay their fellow-mortal for so openly deceiving them!!!³⁵

The editor of *The Catholic* was no less harsh in 1841, when he remarked: "We still find that newspaper, styled the *Christian Guardian*, when it touches on Popery, as lying, trashy, and fanatical a sheet as ever."³⁶ In January, 1842, he turns his attention to a favorite enemy, the *Hamilton Gazette*, to dispose of him in this fashion:

And now we bid this Orange sworn champion adieu. Were it not beneath us (who have frequented the most celebrated universities in Europe; who have moved in the most exalted sphere of educated society,) to enter the lists with such a narrow-minded, prejudiced and untaught party bigot, as the Editor of that course sheet, the *Hamilton Gazette*! There is no clean fighting with a chimney sweep.³⁷

While the provocation was no doubt great, nevertheless Father MacDonald's furibund style is offensive to modern readers and, as a matter of fact, seems more bitter than that of his opponents. However his positive statements of Catholic belief were well written and deserve recognition in the history of Catholic apologetics in early Canada.

Catholic books also were available. *The Toronto Mirror* of February 14, 1840, contains this advertisement:

CATHOLIC BOOKS

³⁵ *The Catholic*, vol. 1, No. 22, Kingston, March 18, 1831, p. 166.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, Hamilton, Nov. 24, 1841, vol. 2, p. 86.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, January 26, 1842, vol. 2, p. 154.

The People of Upper Canada are respectfully informed that an extensive assortment of Bibles, Testaments, Prayer Books, and reading Books; also Controversial Works by eminent authors, are on sale at the store formerly occupied by George Duggan, corner of King and George streets.

The subscriber returns thanks to his Protestant brethren for the support they have given him. May the Almighty dispose their hearts to follow the example of England, Germany, and indeed all the civilized nations of the earth in returning to the bosom of 'Christ's Church; to the faith of the Apostles, and of our forefathers; in fine, to that church which do the pillar and the ground of truth.

READ AND JUDGE FOR YOURSELVES

Toronto, Feb. 13, 1840. M. J. McDONELL.³⁸

Such advertisements appeared frequently in the Irish Catholic press. Previous papers submitted to this association have discussed these important Irish Catholic newspapers: *The Toronto Mirror* and *The Canadian Freeman*. They are invaluable particularly as sources of Reform political thought, but at the same time they defended the faith of the Catholic Irish as well as democratic opinion, and in part made up for a lack of Catholic religious periodicals. Both papers are instruments of ecclesiastical opinion in the separate school controversy of the 1850's, but this was not their sole contribution to the Catholic cause.

For purposes of this paper I have examined *The Toronto Mirror* from 1837 until 1844. It contains no expositions of the Catholic creed and its aim was chiefly to unite Protestant and Catholic Irish to oppose "compact government" in somewhat the same way that the Young Irelanders tried to unite all groups in Ireland to support Repeal. *The Mirror* denounced the rebellion of 1837, but it did not abandon the Reform cause even though it rejected bloodshed. It professed its devotion to the Crown, but at the same time insisted that the executive must be responsible to the electorate, and while it abhorred William Lyon Mackenzie's military operations, it printed his proclamations and led in the defence of the captured rebels against the Tory reaction. Catholic as well as Protestant conservatives were subject to *The Mirror's* abuse; that prominent laymanconvert the Hon. John Elmsley suffered from these attacks along with no less a person than Bishop Alexander Macdonell.

The Mirror protested incessantly that the Irish Catholics were among the most loyal of the Queen's subjects, and it devoted itself to opposing discrimination against Catholics and to supporting Irish Catholic political candidates when they were Reformers. As if to answer the stories of degradation in Catholic countries, the columns of *The Mirror* featured descriptions of the extreme physical and intellectual poverty of England of the "Hungry Forties."

³⁸ *The Mirror*, Toronto, February 14, 1840.

Official reports of conditions in factories and mines and of the desperate situation of the unemployed received full publicity, as did any news of alleged Orange outrages in Ireland and Canada. Following in *The Mirror's* unkind description of the assembling of the Toronto Orange marchers in July, 1843:

... a certain class of men calling themselves Orangemen commenced at day-break to disturb the public peace, by firing shots and shouting to the no small annoyance of Her Majesty's peaceful subjects who were thus alarmed out of their sleep. At twelve o'clock a rabble consisting of silly men, brazen women, and dirty-faced boys and girls, bedizened in their tawdry finery, issued from one of their drinking resorts ...³⁹

If *The Mirror* in its early days contained few articles of a strictly religious nature, still it felt obliged to defend the national faith. Here is its answer in 1840 to a conversion story which had appeared in that leading anti-Catholic paper, *The Globe*:

The Editor of the *Globe* says, in his last number, (on whose authority we know not) that a Mr. J. D. SULLIVAN, a Kerry man, has lately been converted (perhaps, perverted) to the Protestant faith. We beg, for the *Globe's* information, to state, that we never knew a SULLIVAN, or a MULLIGAN, or any other, to become an apostate through conscientious conviction. Perhaps this MR. SULLIVAN had been excommunicated previously to his pretended conversion. The improbability of the latter conclusion, is by no means likely.⁴⁰

Although warm in its support of Irish Catholics, *The Mirror* was yet in many respects a liberal, anti-clerical paper. It is true that its anti-clericalism was directed chiefly against the Church of England, but it condemned as well Bishop Macdonell for his support of the government and for receiving money from the authorities. In July, 1838, it explained that emigrants from Britain flocked to the United States rather than to Canada because "they will have nothing to do with Priest-ridden, Place-ridden Canada."⁴¹ And in August of the same year the paper declared that it was opposed in principle to a union of "throne and altar" because such an identification of church and government would make priests "lords and masters over us, and nothing more than Government agents."⁴²

The Mirror is significant therefore for its political tendencies, rather than its religious views. Yet it did not pass over in silence all of the anti-Catholic articles in the Protestant press, as is shown in this remark in its March 31st, 1838, edition:

³⁹ Ibid., July 14, 1843.

⁴⁰ Ibid., November 13, 1840.

⁴¹ Ibid., July 28, 1838.

⁴² Ibid., August 25, 1838.

The Editor of the *Christian Guardian* has thought fit to republish one of the foulest, basest, and most bigotted articles which appeared in that foul vehicle of slander – the Dublin Record headed “Popery Indulgences,” in his paper of the 21st inst., and added his commentary that outstrips the original, as the mountain torrent exceeds the placid current ... It is with pain we would open our columns for religious controversy; we hold the highest respect for our dissenting brethren, and a secret regard for all ordained Ministers, who study sufficiently, and are proved to possess qualifications far exceeding a jump in the lapstone, or goose, to seize the Gospel and thus pervert it. – Farewell.⁴³

In drawing conclusions from this fierce controversy, it should not be thought for a moment that Upper Canadian Protestants were universally anti-Catholic. There is much evidence that the hierarchy and parish priests as men were held in very high regard by the Protestants, and although as convinced Protestants they disapproved of Catholic doctrine, yet they often voiced appreciation for Catholic charitable and educational work. A letter from a Protestant missionary in Lower Canada to *The Ecclesiastical and Missionary Record, for the Presbyterian Church of Canada*, in 1850 gave this begrudging recognition to Catholic activity:

But false and idolatrous as Popery is, it is seen in actual existence as the national religion of the people; it has magnificent churches; these are crowded with earnest worshippers on Sabbath days and fast days ... So, too, Popery has its Colleges of men devoted to the instruction of the young; and Colleges of women devoted to attend infirmaries, to nurse children, provide for the aged, and attempt the reclamation of the abandoned of their own sex. In these and similar aspects, Popery is a most imposing religion, – a religion which commands the reverence and subjection of those who have been brought up in it. Compared with it, in these aspects, the religion of many Protestants is a cold and ineffective theory in the eye of earnest Romanists, contemptible, because it seems to have no uniting power over the many sects who profess to hold by it.⁴⁴

English Protestants who toured through the Canadas in its early days sometimes took note of the Catholic clergy and laity and their observations on the whole are laudatory. The good manners of the French in the Sandwich area and in Lower Canada was the occasion of comment. All spoke highly of the nuns of Quebec and of the clergy in the two provinces. The tolerance of the French Canadians was remarked upon and Lord Durham was but one of many who paid tribute to the activity of the Catholic clergy in keeping the Irish and French people loyal to the Crown in 1812 and 1837.

One writer, who was not in all respects friendly to Catholicism, said in 1822

⁴³ Ibid., March 31, 1838

⁴⁴ *The Ecclesiastical and Missionary Record, for the Presbyterian Church of Canada*, vol. 6, No. 8, June, 1850, p. 120.

that the Catholic religion in Canada was “harmless, loyal, faithful and brave.”⁴⁵
Another writer, in 1799, gives this typical view of religion in Lower Canada:

Religion appears to have its proper influence upon the inhabitants. Churches are thronged: Peace takes place among the professors of every name. The clergy are well supplied. The English priests have their rewards from England, joined to an annual salary paid by their parishioners. The catholic ministers have certain rents, which are competent to their necessities. From their wealth and good offices, the poor and distressed find great relief from want and woe. The clergy of all ranks are pious, polite men, – of good learning and abilities.”⁴⁶

And an anonymous Presbyterian in 1832, after mentioning that Catholics “are by far the most devotedly loyal subjects his Majesty has in Canada,”⁴⁷(47) praises the Upper Canadian clergy in this manner:

An elder of the Kirk, and bred in the most orthodox part of Scotland, I came to this country strongly prejudiced against Catholicism and its ministers, but experience has shown me that these prejudices were unjust. I expected to find both priests and people as violently opposed to the British government here as at home, – I found them the strongest supporters of the constitution. I had been taught to believe, that a Catholic priest was a hypocritical knave, who ruled his misguided followers for his own selfish purposes, – I have found them a moral and zealous clergy more strict in their attention to their parochial duties than any body of clergy I ever met in any part of the world, and not a bit more intolerant than their clerical brethren of any other sect. And I look upon this public avowal and recantation as a penance for my sins of ignorance, and I hope it will be accepted as such.⁴⁸

Catholics had reason to be grateful to Protestants for more than expressions of this nature. Catholic clergymen at times had occasion to give thanks for the individual generosity of Protestants for financial assistance in building Catholic churches and schools. Admittedly Catholicism was presented in a twisted fashion by many of the Protestant periodicals, a fact which helps to explain much in Upper Canadian political life, but the frequent co-operation between Catholic and Protestant clergymen and statesmen even in those less enlightened days was a happy sign of the building of a future great nation.

⁴⁵ Charles Henry Wilson, *The Wanderer in America*, Thirsk, 1822, p. 53.

⁴⁶ John Cosens Ogden, *A Tour, Through Upper and Lower Canada*. By a Citizen of the United States. Litchfield, 1799, pp. 15, 16.

⁴⁷ *Statistical Sketches of Upper Canada, For the Use of Emigrants*: By A Backwoodsman. London, 1832, p. 99.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 100, 101.