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Review article: Canada's sectarian past*

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William J. Smyth's impressive analysis of Toronto Orangeism is no mere coda to his 'seminal' *The sash Canada wore: a historical geography of the Orange Order in Canada* (Toronto, 1980), written in collaboration with Cecil J. Houston. Apart from demonstrating that presidency of a university (Maynooth) need not preclude an intellectual afterlife, it offers the most probing scrutiny yet available of how Orangeism operated at local level as a political force and dispenser of patronage. Throughout the century under scrutiny (1850–1950), Orangemen dominated the municipal council and Toronto's parliamentary representation at provincial and dominion level. This was not achieved by unswerving alliance with one political party, as in Ulster for almost a century after 1885, but through sponsorship of individual candidates affirming the institution's 'core values' such as temperance, Sabbatarianism, and especially anti-Catholicism. The choice of sponsored candidates was itself an exercise in democracy: in 1925, a 'popular ballot' of lodge delegates was held immediately after the deadline for council nominations to determine the 'Orange slate' for the forthcoming municipal election (p. 211).

Membership also became a valuable credential for securing public employment at all levels of government, Orange predominance being most marked in the police, fire, and postal services. Smyth's evidence is robustly statistical, bringing together Orange, census, and administrative records to create prosopographies of Orange public employees. The statistical profile is adroitly complemented by accounts of specific election campaigns and political correspondence, illustrating how pressure was applied and success achieved. Especially between 1860 and 1930, Orange organisers were shameless in controlling public representation and employment, displaying a strong sense of fraternal entitlement which was only seriously challenged after the Second World War. Unlike Tammany Hall, with which Smyth draws comparisons, Orange power seems to have been widely dispersed rather than boss-driven, with less evidence of systematic corruption. But his analysis shows how closely Orange patronage in Toronto mimicked the success of Hibernian patronage

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* Toronto, the Belfast of Canada: the Orange Order and the shaping of municipal culture. By William J. Smyth. Pp xvi, 306. Toronto: University of Toronto Press. 2015. $(Can.)29.95.

The Imperial Irish: Canada's Irish Catholics fight the Great War, 1914–1918. By Mark G. McGowan. Pp xxxii, 387. Montreal and Kingston: McGill–Queen's University Press. 2017. £34.

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in Boston and New York, where Catholic Irishmen likewise secured a stranglehold on employment in the police and fire services and lower posts in the public sector. In each case, sectarian combination allowed one community spanning all social classes to secure preferential access to employment. The Catholic minority, which Smyth calls the order's 'nemesis' implying inevitable retribution, is a constant background presence, marking the well-policed limits of the Orange Order's peculiar incarnation of democracy and ecumenicism.

Orange dominance of the fire service became tragically manifest in 1902, when a downtown blaze resulted in the death of five firemen, all Orangemen, belonging to five different lodges. Smyth brilliantly reconstructs their diverse backgrounds, and the fraternal choreography of the vast funeral procession (pp 201–4). Orange influence in the police was particularly brazen, with a 'police degree team', unmatched in any other occupation, which initiated policemen and administered higher degrees throughout the Toronto district (p. 200). Orange patronage extended into the more shadowy private sector, with or without the support of employers. The fact that Lord Pirrie became a home ruler did not prevent his Orange employees from repeatedly expelling Catholics from the Belfast shipyards. Likewise, Toronto's Eaton retail company, with up to 11,000 staff serving an Irish convert to Methodism whose family never joined the order, became a by-word for discrimination against Catholics and Jews (pp 188, 206). Toronto was 'the Belfast of Canada', a pejorative term for Smyth as for Canadian contemporaries (Edwardian Belfast's glossy reputation as an industrial powerhouse and bustling metropolis is ignored). As a geographer, he rightly depicts the growth of both cities as the product of incessant immigration from rural hinterlands and (in Toronto's case) from overseas. In both cities, a small Catholic minority was consigned to the economic and social margin by a powerful and self-confident Protestant majority, knit together in a web of church organisations and fraternities. Both experienced ugly sectarian rioting, but in Toronto, unlike Belfast, this virtually ceased after 1875 and at its worst was painful rather than fatal.

Over the half century preceding the Great War, the economic and civic growth of both cities was matched by expanding Orange membership. In Belfast, Orangeism expanded further after each world war, and despite fluctuations its membership in 1972 was greater than in 1912. In Toronto, though decline became precipitate only in the 1940s, membership never surpassed that recorded in 1914. This contrast is ascribed in part to extensive European immigration, which created a multicultural society increasingly ill-attuned to Orange values – despite the formation in 1930 of Giuseppe Garibaldi L.O.L. 3115, composed entirely of Italian converts to Methodism (pp 233–5). Belfast Orangemen did not have to face the challenge of multicultural immigration until recently. 'Mixed marriages', almost unknown in early twentieth-century Belfast, constantly breached the boundary between Toronto's communities: in 1905, three-fifths of all marriages involving Catholics in York County (encompassing Toronto) included a non-Catholic spouse (p. 70).

Though Smyth treats Toronto Orangeism as a cultural export from Ulster, the exported product was obviously not the atypical and notoriously volatile Belfast variant. The Canadian ritual was transplanted from Dublin by the fraudster Ogle Gowan, and Toronto's Irish-born brethren would mainly have emigrated from rural Ulster, where the order was more populous, more sober, and less aggressive than in Belfast. Smyth exaggerates the primacy of Belfast in Orangeism before partition, claiming that by 1909 (when Dublin remained the administrative headquarters) 'Belfast was recognized as the undisputed capital of Irish Orangeism' (p. 65). He does not mention either the long-standing

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numerical weakness of Belfast Orangeism within Ulster, or the relatively low 'Orange density' of Toronto within Ontario. Nor does he mention or explain the fact that Toronto's Orange density consistently fell short of Belfast's. He demonstrates conclusively that, at its peak, Toronto Orangeism was 'Irish' only in its distant origins: most brethren by the early twentieth century were natives of Canada, and more of the immigrant minority were British than Irish. For Smyth, this demonstrates the order's success in adapting itself to local political and social conditions, so maintaining its appeal long after Irish immigration (predominant in the early nineteenth century) had become a trickle. Conversely, its decline coincided with increasing reliance on that trickle of Ulster immigrants, often bearing transfer certificates, whose home-grown preoccupations became increasingly marginal as the city diversified.

Smyth's profile of most of Toronto's brethren in 1894 (the date of the only detailed city register of members) makes exhaustive use of manuscript census schedules for 1891, an invaluable source not available when *The sash Canada wore* appeared in 1980. He portrays a remarkably eclectic organisation, broadly similar in composition to lodges which have been analysed in other regions of Orange settlement such as northern England and Australasia. Half of Toronto's Orangemen were semi-skilled or unskilled (not far below the proportion for Toronto Catholics in 1891), but over one-sixth were in clerical posts (nearly twice the Catholic proportion). Less than half were Canadian-born (compared with two-thirds of Toronto's population), and one-eighth had Canadian-born fathers. One-quarter were born in Britain (just exceeding the proportion from Ireland), and few of these native Britons had Irish fathers. Almost as many were Methodists as Anglicans, reflecting the strength of non-conformism in Ontario, and less than one-quarter were Presbyterians. Two-thirds were married, and Orangemen were under-represented among the over-55s and the under-25s (pp 180–7). Far from implying that Toronto Orangeism had 'surprisingly shallow' local roots, the under-representation of Canadian natives is surely a by-product of the absence of children from the register of brethren.

Always temperate and objective in tone, Smyth nevertheless builds a powerful case for viewing Toronto Orangeism as a negative force in civic affairs because of its highly effective application of sectarian principles. He has little to say about positive aspects of evangelical Protestantism as embodied in Orange lodges, such as encouragement of temperance, popular education, and fair dealing among Protestants. Fair dealing did not extend to Catholics: from 1936, brethren were circulated with a blacklist of local businesses directing all or part of their assessment taxes to Catholic schools (p. 208), recalling the anti-Protestant 'Belfast Boycott' of 1920–2. Yet Orange influence did not prevent Archbishop Lynch from exercising limited political and municipal patronage in the 1860s and 1870s, in return for affirmations of civic patriotism. Nor does Smyth clarify the credentials required to secure Orange patronage. Were preferred candidates expected to be or to become Orangemen? If not, did they require proof of religious obervance and sobriety from Protestant clergymen or notables? Or was it sometimes sufficient simply not to be Catholic? To assess the relative weight of these factors would require close analysis of a substantial sample of well-documented appointments.

Smyth's sharp focus on Orangeism blurs the municipal influence of other organisations, especially the Protestant churches which, unlike Lynch's Catholic archdiocese, are virtually ignored. Little attempt is made to assess the influence on civil administration of other fraternities, such as the Oddfellows and Freemasons, apart from quoting an observation by

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Archbishop Lynch in 1872: 'Railroad companies are generally Masonic, the muncipalities Orange and the Government employees are for the most part of both camps' (p. 124). It is surely emblematic that the last Orange mayor was toppled in 1954 by Nathan Phillips, a Jewish lawyer who was also a prominent Freemason (p. 252). The new administration conducted a survey of the twenty-three councillors, enumerating twelve Freemasons but only seven Orangemen (of whom five were also Freemasons). Since Ontario Freemasonry continued to expand while the smaller bodies of Orangemen and Oddfellows declined in tandem (as shown by Eric Kaufmann's membership database), one might wish for a complementary study of municipal infiltration by other fraternities.

Smyth is surprisingly reticent about Orange involvement in the Great War, apart from reporting the enlistment of about 3,000 Toronto brethren in the Canadian Expeditionary Force (C.E.F.), amounting to almost one-third of Orange membership in 1914. No reference is made to the formation and functions of military lodges enrolling hundreds of Canadian servicemen overseas, or to the significance of war commemoration for the order in Canada as elsewhere in the empire. Orange participation in the Second World War is completely ignored.

The response of 'Canada's Irish Catholics' to the Great War is the subject of another interesting and densely documented study by Mark McGowan, himself a prominent historian of Toronto. McGowan takes a less bleak view of the minority experience than Smyth, emphasising pre-war evidence of upward social mobility, civic inclusion, and adoption of 'imperial' values as a means of asserting Canadian patriotism. The positive response of Anglophone bishops, clergy, and laymen to the call to arms in 1914–16 is depicted as confirmation of the success of this prolonged process of inclusion, despite the persistence of segregated communal institutions such as denominational schools supported by state taxes.

McGowan's irenic interpretation relies heavily on the supposedly high rate of Catholic military enlistment. Yet the official tabulations by religious denomination of C.E.F. volunteers who left for overseas service, up to June 1917, indicate startling under-representation of Catholics by comparison with census returns (p. 108). Catholics accounted for 14 per cent of volunteers but 43 per cent of the Canadian population, whereas Anglicans constituted 47 per cent of volunteers and 16 per cent of the population! These percentages vary slightly from those tabulated by McGowan, which fail to match the numbers given in the same table. The statistics imply that 15.8 per cent of the entire Anglican population volunteered, compared with just 1.8 per cent of Canada's Catholics. When published, these damning if implausible statistics provoked a convalescent army chaplain to rework the data in order to separate 'French' from 'Irish' Catholics, concluding that the Irish Catholic contribution was proportionately second only to the Anglican, outdoing the Presbyterians and Methodists. Fr John J. O'Gorman's calculation indicated that 71 per cent of Catholic recruits were non-French, whereas the vast majority of Canadian Catholics were French speakers. McGowan accepts these partisan findings without further scrutiny. Little is revealed about the effectiveness of attempts to mobilise and enlist French Catholics, apart from noting the initial support of all Canadian bishops for the imperial war effort, the problems caused by Henri Bourassa's independence movement, and long-running tensions between Anglophone and Francophone Catholics over issues such as bilingual schooling.

If McGowan's study excludes Francophones, it incorporates many other Catholics who were surely not 'Irish'. Just as most Orangemen were either

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Canadian-born or of British rather than Irish birth, few Catholic recruits were demonstrably from Ireland. Using attestation papers for selected battalions along with rolls of honour and other lists, McGowan shows that about three-quarters of 'Irish' Catholic recruits were Canadian-born, with roughly equal minorities born in Ireland and Britain (pp 140–5). His criterion for discriminating between 'Irish', French, and 'other' Catholics is apparently surname (p. 265). Nearly half of the supposedly 'Irish' Catholics in a sample of 470 Ottawa Valley recruits were unskilled or semi-skilled, compared with one-third of the entire sample (pp 157–9). Only one-twentieth were married, an outcome encouraged by the humanely feminist provision that 'in the earliest phase of recruitment, married men were allowed to enlist only if they had written permission from their wives' (p. 137).

Catholics remained a small minority even within ostensibly ethnic units such as the 208th (Toronto Irish) battalion, whose 658 members in May 1917 were analysed by a group of McGowan's students in 2014 (p. 121). This analysis showed that only 15 per cent were Catholics (including 2.2 per cent not categorised as 'Irish'), as against Anglicans (36 per cent), Presbyterians (22 per cent), and Methodists (14 per cent). It is a pity that McGowan, unlike Smyth, offers no comparison between the characteristics of recruits and comparable census populations. Yet his book is studded with memorable statistical miniatures: Canadian Catholic chaplains heard 65,000 confessions in the nine months up to March 1918 (in one session requiring less than two minutes per confession); and the incidence of venereal disease for Catholics (16 per cent) was identical to that for the whole C.E.F. (pp 187, 193).

McGowan's statistics are sometimes capricious, and he is inclined to use terms such as 'motherland' and 'the old sod' which have passed out of general favour. His Irish background is not always reliable, as in the quadruply inaccurate claim that '400,000 Ulstermen and 250,000 Ulsterwomen' signed 'the Solemn League of the Covenant' in 1912 (p. 35) – even Smyth misrepresents the number of signatories, though less egregiously (p. 32). McGowan's strongest chapters assemble rich documentation of pro-war clerical rhetoric, practical campaigns at parish level to raise funds or knit socks, tussles with hostile officials to augment the inadequate provision of Catholic chaplains, and personal testimony concerning issues such as the use of scapulars and other tokens of fidelity by Catholic soldiers. Suggestive reference is made to the contribution of Catholic fraternities such as the Knights of Columbus, Catholic Mutual Benefit Society, and Ancient Order of Hibernians, whose Canadian branch organisers were obliged to disavow the pro-German leadership of the American organisation (pp 117–19, 217).

McGowan demonstrates that in Canada, as in Australia and Ireland itself, many young Catholic laymen responded to clerical appeals to translate imperial patriotism into personal sacrifice. By Fr O'Gorman's calculation, over 36,000 Anglophone Catholics joined the C.E.F. – far fewer than in either Ireland or Australia, but more than the dismissive rhetoric of Orange spokesmen implied. As in Australia, the reduction of enlistment after 1916 cannot be ascribed to Catholic endorsement of the Dublin Rebellion or the anti-war Sinn Féin movement: the Canadian Catholic hierarchy and most lay organisations continued to advocate home rule as an essential element of imperial patriotism. This pioneering work should inspire further studies embracing the entire Catholic spectrum, and probing the interaction of Catholic and Protestant soldiers within 'Irish' battalions and the C.E.F. in general. Meanwhile, let us welcome two books which illuminate, with fresh evidence and erudition, Canada's uncomfortably sectarian past.

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