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Popery and Progress: Anti-Catholicism in Mid-Nineteenth-Century Nova Scotia

An editorial in a November 1859 issue of the *Eastern Chronicle*, a Pictou County weekly, asserted that the cause of Canada's perennial political difficulties was the "dominancy of the Roman Catholic priesthood" there. Describing the Catholic Church's tactics as "sublime" and its opposition to 'representation by population' as disgusting, the paper predicted that a strong "Protestant feeling" would develop in Canada West to counteract the "Jesuitical policy of the priesthood in the eastern province."¹ To modern Canadians, all too familiar with the linguistic and cultural tensions that divide French and English Canada, the *Eastern Chronicle's* analysis, with its emphasis on religious differences, may seem almost quaint. Yet it certainly did not appear that way to the paper's contemporary readers. Indeed, in the minds of a great many mid-nineteenth-century Nova Scotians, Roman Catholicism was much more than a rival, erroneous religious faith. As militant Protestants never tired of repeating, it was also a system of beliefs promoting disloyalty and oppression and leading to moral, economic, and social backwardness.

It should be no surprise that colonial Protestants held such views. Given the prevalence of anti-Catholic fears and worries throughout the Anglo-American world in the nineteenth century it would have been astonishing if many Nova Scotians had not shared the common prejudices. Yet the manifestations of anti-Catholicism that surfaced in the colony during the 1840s and 1850s were not just a mere echo of sentiments voiced loudly in Great Britain and the United States.² They also represented the sincere convictions of individuals and groups living in the particular political, social, and economic context of colonial Nova Scotia. The anti-Catholicism that emerged from that context resembled an ideology with its own set of assumptions and internal logic. Except for a few minor incidents of actual violence, the religious strife that developed during the middle decades of the nine-

teenth century was mostly rhetorical, whether expressed in an article, pamphlet, or speech.

Colonial Nova Scotia is not generally thought of as a place of strongly held anti-Catholic prejudices. It is more commonly known for the moderate, tolerant attitude it adopted toward its Catholic minority.³ After all, the franchise was extended to Roman Catholics relatively early in the history of the province (in 1789, compared with 1810 in New Brunswick and 1829 in Prince Edward Island), and the Nova Scotia legislature was the first in the entire British Empire to admit a Catholic member (in 1823, six years before the passage of the Catholic Emancipation Act in Great Britain).⁴ By the middle of the nineteenth century, however, the spirit of toleration for Catholics was definitely on the wane. Hundreds if not thousands of anti-Catholic editorials, letters and stories appeared in Nova Scotia newspapers, denominational and secular, during the 1840s and 1850s. Colonial politicians, ever responsive to an issue with voter appeal, did not hesitate to add their voices to the public debate on the "Catholic question." During the first major outbreak of anti-Catholic sentiment, the 1847 "*Cross* controversy," the Conservatives led the attack on the "papists"; a decade later the Liberals were in the vanguard of the forces of militant Protestantism. Two elections were fought in which Protestant-Catholic relations were a major campaign issue, and a government was even defeated in the assembly on the same question.

What brought about the apparent change in attitude among Nova Scotian Protestants, moving them within two decades from tolerance or indifference to distrust and hostility towards their Catholic fellow citizens?⁵ The short answer is immigration. During the first half of the nineteenth century the Roman Catholic population of Nova Scotia increased dramatically. Where in 1830 roughly one in six colonists was Catholic, by 1867 the ratio was between one in four and one in three.⁶ Nowhere was the growth more pronounced than in Halifax. Between 1815 and 1838 approximately eleven thousand Irish arrived in the colonial capital, most of whom were probably Catholic.⁷ The tide of Irish Catholic immigration was largely over by 1843, though in 1847 a final wave of twelve hundred disembarked in Halifax in flight from the famine at home.⁸

While not all of the Irish who landed in Halifax took up residence there, enough of them stayed to have a pronounced impact on the city. In 1827 25.1 per cent of Halifax's population was Roman Catholic. A decade later it was 35.1 per cent and by 1851 42.4 per cent. Of the roughly 8,800 Catholics in Halifax in 1851, approximately 7,500 were of Irish origin.⁹ This substantial influx, with its predictable impact on the local health and labour scene, would turn Halifax into a centre of

anti-Catholic prejudice in the colony, with Irish Catholics being singled out for the strongest criticism.

The coming of large numbers of Roman Catholics to Nova Scotia during the first half of the nineteenth century effected some important changes in the colonial Catholic Church. Saint Mary's Seminary (later Saint Mary's University) was founded in 1840 because of the need to train priests locally to meet the needs of the new and larger congregations. In 1842 Rome raised the area from a vicariate to a full diocese; two years later a second diocese was created, so that there were bishops of Halifax and Arichat.¹⁰ Between 1843 and 1849 six predominately Irish Catholic organizations were founded in Halifax and in 1849 two orders of nuns arrived in the capital.¹¹ As a result of the expansion of the faith during the 1840s the episcopal status of Nova Scotia was raised again in 1852 when an archbishop of Halifax was named.¹²

The growth in the Catholic population, the enhancement of the status of the local church, and the increase of Catholic organizations disturbed many Nova Scotian Protestants, particularly evangelical clergymen. They watched the developments with dismay, for in their eyes "Romish" religion was a faith based on falsehoods and immorality. One response was a growth in inter-denominational cooperation. Often following models from the British context, between 1815 and mid-century, colonial evangelicals combined to establish numerous societies and missions that aimed to promote Protestantism and, on occasion, convert Catholics.¹³ These initiatives were undoubtedly aided, and in some cases perhaps even fostered, by the contemporaneous surge in the size of the Roman Catholic Church. The experience gained through such cooperative efforts as the Bible Society and the Micmac Missionary Society laid the groundwork for the more expressly anti-Catholic inter-denominational alliances of the 1850s.

While the evangelical clergy formed the vanguard of the anti-Catholic forces in Nova Scotia there were others who worried about the arrival of more "Romanists" for strictly secular reasons. Some, thinking primarily of social and economic consequences, complained that the "starving pauper emigration" would lead to "the ruin of these Colonies in every sense, industrial, moral and religious."¹⁴ Others feared the harmful influences that additional "papists" would have on Nova Scotia's political life and its attachment to Great Britain. That so many of the new Catholics were Irish was especially troubling as practically everyone was aware of the difficulties the mother country was having with the "Irish question," and no one wanted to see that situation repeated in Nova Scotia.¹⁵ To Protestants, the spread of Catholicism foreshadowed the advance of lethargy, submissiveness, and oppression. Freedom, by which mid-century Protestants seem to

have meant a spirit of self-reliance and initiative in economic matters and independence of opinion on political questions, was thought to be an exclusively Protestant virtue.

Though anti-Catholic fears and prejudices had been articles of faith among Protestants since the Reformation, what was new in mid-nineteenth-century Nova Scotia was the sudden and sustained outburst of such sentiments in newspapers and pamphlets, on the hustings, in the legislature, and presumably on the streets. The first extended manifestation surfaced in 1847.

The events of 1847, particularly the so-called "responsible government" election of that year, have traditionally been treated in political and constitutional terms. Most interpretations stress the importance of the Reform party's victory in the provincial election, claiming that it ushered in a new era in imperial relations and saw the emergence of Canadian self-government. Preoccupation with constitutional aspects, however, has prevented historians from recognizing the significant role religious animosity played in the election. They have generally adopted the reformers' view that "Catholic ascendancy" was a specious issue, raised by Conservative politicians desperate to divert public attention from the "real" question of responsible government.¹⁶ The sheer quantity and strident tone of the anti-Catholic material belie such facile dismissals.

The outbreak of anti-Catholicism that occurred in 1847 marked the nadir in Protestant-Catholic relations during the 1840s. In the months that preceded it Protestant complaints about the growing influence of Nova Scotian Catholics increased steadily, particularly in the tory press. For several months, before and after the 1 October 1846 civic election in Halifax, Conservative newspapers complained that the contest revealed blatant "indications of a striving for *religious* dominance" by Catholics.¹⁷ They charged that there were so many Irish Catholics in the capital that the reform-minded priests who controlled their votes were able to determine the outcome of the election.¹⁸ Taken to its logical Protestant and tory conclusion, this meant that the Liberal party was actually being directed by the local Roman Catholic hierarchy, who in turn were mere vassals of the Pope.

At the same time as Protestant fears of Catholics were growing, Catholics themselves were becoming increasingly indignant of Protestant condescension towards their beliefs and their clergy. Increasing in number and influence, they were much less willing than before to tolerate censure and disapprobation. In the tense atmosphere that had developed, only a small episode was needed to touch off an outbreak of bitter religious strife in the colony.

The event which precipitated the 1847 controversy was a costume ball at Mason Hall on 2 February. Among the Haligonians at the affair was a young woman wearing her version of a nun's habit. A few days later the Roman Catholic weekly, the *Cross*, protested that the woman's choice of costume was an insult to the Catholic religion.¹⁹ The paper announced that Roman Catholics would no longer endure the vilifications of Protestants as they had in the past. "We want none of those condescending, patronizing airs. We will be bullied or cajoled no longer."²⁰

The Protestant press was quick to pick up the gauntlet thrown down by the *Cross*. The *Guardian*, newspaper of the Church of Scotland, proclaimed that it was glad the *Cross* was disputing the "nun" issue in the open; it was a marked improvement over the former Catholic approaches, "the Inquisition or the stake."²¹ The Anglican *Times* commented that the Catholic weekly's defence of "popish religion" was bile," which proved that the paper was "a true cross—between the bigot of the sixteenth-century and the jesuit of the present day."²² The Baptist *Christian Messenger* made no specific reference to the *Cross* or the fancy dress incident until the end of April, but it did noticeably increase its anti-Catholic content during the first few months of the controversy.²³ When the *Messenger* finally did comment it argued that the Roman Catholic plan was to excite its adherents with the "nun" issue and then organize them "to act together under their Religious directors" on behalf of the Liberals.²⁴ Similarly, the secular, conservative *Halifax Morning Post* maintained that Liberals and Catholics "are one and the same—that they are leagued together—that they have the same objects and ends."²⁵

The unsympathetic and derisive reaction of the denominational and conservative newspapers prompted the editors of the *Cross* to respond in kind. It condemned the "soul-destroying doctrines . . . of the traitorous and bloody Knox, as well as the gloomy, suicidal tenets of the faggot-lighting, hypocritical monster, Jack Calvin, the Robespierre of Geneva."²⁶ By the end of the first month of the controversy the Catholic weekly was routinely publishing epigrams like: "Protestantism and Ignorance are so nearly allied, that one cannot exist without the other . . . Protestantism is based on falsehood, its essence is deception, its food is calumny."²⁷

Denigrating someone else's religion became a game of ideological one-upmanship, with both sides publishing defences of their own faith and attacks on the other's. In the Protestant journals, analysis of Catholic theology (tenets like transubstantiation, purgatory, and papal infallibility) continued for months and was carried on best in the denominational papers which were accustomed to such rigorous tasks.

Yet even a secular paper like the *Morning Post* felt obliged to editorialize on the implications of Catholic doctrines and practices. Indeed, its religious convictions were strong enough to prompt it eventually to alter its name to the *Morning Post and Protestant Loyalist*.²⁸

The Nova Scotian newspapers supporting the Liberal party attempted to remain largely aloof from the "*Cross* controversy." To be sure many of their readers held strong anti-Catholic prejudices of their own; for a decade later Liberals would be in the forefront of the nativistic complaints directed at colonial Catholics. In 1847, however, the Liberals were more than happy to receive the electoral support of Roman Catholics. The Liberal press consequently dismissed the religious quarrel of that year as a tory tactic designed to alienate Protestants from Liberal ranks.²⁹ But as the 1847 election campaign progressed into July and August it became increasingly difficult to remain neutral or indifferent to the issue of "Catholic ascendancy." Conservative candidates, zealous Protestant ministers, and crusading newspapers spread anti-Catholic material to most areas of the colony. Thus, Liberal candidates in Yarmouth, Annapolis, and Cumberland counties found themselves forced by taunting crowds and Conservative opponents to debate the question of "Catholic ascendancy" and to deny that the Liberal party was controlled by Roman Catholic Bishop Walsh.³⁰ Yet in handling the "*Cross* controversy" these spokesmen for the Liberal party betrayed a lack of genuine faith in Roman Catholics. On no occasion did they offer forthright defences of the essential loyalty and good will of the Catholic population of Nova Scotia. Nor did they repudiate the assertions that Roman Catholicism was a perverted religion whose adherents lusted after all forms of power. Rather, Liberals generally met the "Catholic ascendancy" argument with explanations that colonial Catholics were incapable of acting in despotic fashion because they constituted only one-fifth of the population. Nothing was said to remove traditional Protestant prejudices about the "true" nature of "popery."³¹

The "*Cross* controversy" lasted six months, then faded from public debate after the 5 August 1847 election. Yet the prejudices and anxieties that had surfaced during the episode would not disappear as quickly. Over the next decade anti-Catholic opinions were frequently expressed in colonial newspapers, especially in the denominational ones. For the most part the issues discussed did not relate directly to Nova Scotia;³² instead, they concerned such British developments as the "papal aggression" crisis and the Tractarian movement, or the North American lecture tour of Roman Catholic apostate Father Gavazzi, or the spread of the Know-Nothing movement in the United States. One-sided interpretations of these British or American devel-

opments helped keep alive anti-Catholic stereotypes within the colony.³³ Indeed, such close coverage of those issues probably helped foster an atmosphere of worried anticipation that similar incidents might soon arise in Nova Scotia. The accounts of Protestant-Catholic riots in Quebec City or Philadelphia and the treatises on the errors and ramifications of "popery" were always written so as to suggest that ignorance and violence were endemic to Roman Catholicism. When at last in 1856 there was a fresh outbreak of religious antagonism in the colony it came as something of a self-fulfilling prophecy.

The combination of events that precipitated widespread anti-Catholic sentiment in 1856 actually began in 1855 with Joseph Howe's imprudent attempt to recruit soldiers in the United States on behalf of the British war effort in the Crimea.³⁴ While Howe thought his efforts to raise a "foreign legion" a patriotic act, William Condon, president of the Charitable Irish Society in Halifax, disagreed.³⁵ Condon became outraged when Irishmen from American coastal cities arrived in Halifax en route for the Crimea.³⁶ He wired a telegram to an Irish paper in New York which in turn revealed Howe's recruiting efforts. The exposé unleashed a stormy controversy in the northeastern United States since the recruitment violated American neutrality. The enlistment had to be abandoned, and Howe soon returned to Nova Scotia, filled with bitterness. He placed the blame for the episode upon the Irish Catholics of Halifax, particularly William Condon.³⁷

One full year later, in the spring of 1856, a series of events occurred that further estranged Howe and other Nova Scotian Protestants from colonial Catholics. On Sunday, 25 May 1856, during the feast of the Corpus Christi, a group of Protestant railway workers ridiculed the ceremonial procession and faith of the Catholic labourers. The following day there was an altercation on the railway line north of Enfield when offended Catholics attacked the shanty of a man named Gourlay, who was reputed to have been among the heckling Protestants the day before. It fell to Joseph Howe, as chairman of the Railway board, to lay charges against the individuals responsible for the "riot." A fortnight later, on June 5, there was another incident to inflame Protestant-Catholic relations. At a public meeting called to prepare an address to the recently dismissed British minister to the United States, J.F.T. Crampton, several Irish Catholics voiced their disapproval of the role Crampton had played in the Crimean recruitment scheme the year before. Joseph Howe, who was present at the meeting and of course shared the blame, was incensed by the jeers. He unleashed "one of the most cutting merciless attacks against the Irish," denouncing them as disloyal and as "promoters of turbulence and disloyalty."³⁸ The Catholics at the meeting replied in kind and, according to a Yar-

mouth paper, "the proceedings became warm and terminated noisily."³⁹

Militant Protestants and imperial patriots were predictably outraged by the sequence of events that had taken place during the past year. First, the recruitment for the Crimea had been halted; then there had been the religious "riot" on the railway line followed shortly afterward by a public display of disloyalty by a group of Halifax Irish. The final straw came in December 1856. At the criminal trials for the eleven Irishmen alleged to have taken part in the "Gourlay Shanty Riot," the jury, composed of both Protestants and Catholics, reportedly split along religious lines. The ensuing dismissal of charges enraged many Protestants. Joseph Howe wrote a series of letters to the *Morning Chronicle* in which he castigated local Catholics for disloyalty and wanton violence. His general thesis was that it was the "common right of every Nova Scotian" to uphold "what we believe to be true, and to laugh at what we believe to be absurd," without fear of reprisal.⁴⁰

Thomas Chandler Haliburton wrote Howe in early 1857 commending him for his "admirable letter to the Catholics . . . I am glad there is one person in the country manly enough to say what all think, but few like even to breathe. It is time they understood other people have rights as well as them."⁴¹ It was not long before hundreds

The idea of Protestant solidarity at times of anti-Catholic anxiety was an old one, dating back centuries. Howe was not the first to make the appeal within Nova Scotia, but his prominent public position and oratorical and writing abilities gave the concept an unprecedented boost. Zealous Liberals and militant Protestants leapt on the anti-Catholic bandwagon, which quickly picked up a momentum all its own. In mid-March 1857, for example, the Free Church of Scotland and the Presbyterian Church of Nova Scotia laid the groundwork for an interdenominational alliance whose purpose was to arrest the spread of "popery" in the colony. Throughout the spring and summer of 1857 there was more and more talk of the need for closer collaboration among Protestant sects in their common struggle against Roman Catholicism. Several incidents occurred that year that likely would have had little significance but for the depth of anti-Catholic sentiment at the time. In August relatives of a deceased woman from Barney's River (near Arisaig), in accordance with her expressed wishes, removed her coffin from its grave in a Protestant cemetery and reinterred it in a nearby Catholic graveyard. Liberal and Protestant newspapers demanded that the Conservative Solicitor-General "stand up for Protestantism" and investigate the actions of the "Popish Resurrectionists."⁴⁴ Three months later, in November 1857, there was a fracas at Grand Lake (Halifax County) involving Protestants and Catholics on opposite sides. Predictably, the Liberal press blamed the riot on the innate intolerance and violence of Irish Catholics. The *Morning Chronicle* reported that the brawl had started after objections were raised to the singing of an Orange song, thereby proving that Protestants would henceforth be restricted in the songs they would be permitted to sing. By way of contrast, "Irish Catholics sing their songs all over Nova Scotia. They write and spout their treasonable and offensive sentiments when and where they please, and no man breaks their heads."⁴⁵

In the spring of 1858 the interdenominational organization initiated the year before by the Free Church and Presbyterian Church was formally established. It claimed representation from every Protestant sect and adopted the name Protestant Alliance after an existing association in Great Britain. The first and largest Alliance was formed in Halifax, with an organizing committee of both laity and clergy. New Glasgow and Pictou followed suit with Alliances of their own a few months later; by 1859 there was at least one branch in Cape Breton as well.⁴⁶ The Halifax Protestant Alliance decided that its most important role in the battle against "popery" would be on the educational front. Accordingly, it organized a series of public lectures that commenced in November 1858. As it happened the introductory lecture

was delivered only a few days after yet another religious controversy began, this time revolving around the conversion to Roman Catholicism of the Anglican minister of St. Paul's in Halifax, Rev. Edmund Maturin. The defection to Catholic ranks of any prominent Protestant would have created a stir; the apostasy of a clergyman simply appalled militant Protestants. The sectarian press greeted the news with ridicule, and the months that followed witnessed a spate of pamphlets on the topic.⁴⁷ Due in part to the controversy surrounding Maturin, the first series of Protestant Alliance lectures (delivered from November 1858 to April 1859) were well attended and the demand for published versions exceeded the supply.⁴⁸

Since the anti-Catholic attacks of the Protestant Alliance added support to Liberal charges of "Catholic Ascendancy," the colonial Conservative party complained that the Alliance was meddling in political affairs. The *Acadian Recorder* claimed it was a "political conspiracy" of "unprincipled men" who used religion as a "cloak" covering the attempt to restore the Liberals to power.⁴⁹ In the same way that Liberals had denied the validity of Conservative charges in 1847, the Tories during the 1850s maintained that the Liberals were trying to "distract the country from observation of the results of the imbecility, corruption, and prodigality which had characterized their administration."⁵⁰ A majority of Nova Scotians, however, appeared to have accepted the anti-Catholic arguments put forth by the Liberals and their zealous Protestant allies. In the election held in May 1859, in which "Catholic Ascendancy" was the single most important issue, the Liberals were victorious. They owed their victory, in part at least, to the influence of the Protestant Alliance and the widespread prejudices against Catholics and the Irish.⁵¹ With the accession to power of the Liberals, Protestants ceased to speak of a "Provincial Vatican" or of Romish control over the government. The *Morning Chronicle* rejoiced: "Nova Scotia is herself again. Her big heart once more beats healthily. She has thrown off the yoke of tyranny . . . Nova Scotia, Protestant Nova Scotia is free."⁵²

From this summary of the manifestations of anti-Catholicism in mid-nineteenth-century Nova Scotia one could make the following generalizations: anti-Catholic opinions were shared by Protestants of all denominations, politicians from both parties showed themselves willing and able to exploit the prejudices for their own electoral ends, and the Halifax Irish bore the brunt of the abuse. That much is obvious, and hardly surprising given the prevalence of anti-Catholic sentiments in Protestant countries during the nineteenth century. In large part, therefore, the Nova Scotia experience may be viewed as a variation on the general anti-Catholic theme being played out in con-

temporary British America, Great Britain and the United States. There was considerably less violence than in some other areas (which witnessed annual riots on March 17 and July 12 and even the burning of large buildings), but that was due less to the innate restraint of Nova Scotian Protestants than to more tangible factors. The most important of these was probably the cessation of Irish Catholic immigration after 1847.⁵³ By way of contrast, in the United States and to a lesser extent in Canada, the apparently unceasing tide of immigrants created severe economic, health, and social problems that gave birth to a more violent strain of religious and ethnic bigotry. A second factor that may have helped keep Protestant-Catholic animosity to a war of words was the relative weakness of the Orange order in the colony.⁵⁴ Had there been more Irish Protestants in Nova Scotia, particularly in Halifax where there were so many Irish Catholics,⁵⁵ there likely would have been many more Orange lodges, more potential for violent clashes, and a more prominent role for Orangeism in colonial anti-Catholicism.

The relative absence of violence in the Nova Scotia setting permits us to focus more sharply on the content of the anti-Catholic ideology itself. Since the religious conflict was primarily a clash of rhetoric, close analysis of the ideas expressed should offer insights into the issues that were most troubling to mid-century colonists. "Popery" was a threat, Protestants maintained, but to whom or what and why? Two fundamental complaints stand out. One pertains to the nativistic contention that the growth in the Catholic population, especially the Irish Catholic population, endangered both cherished values and the colony's attachment to Great Britain. This is a major topic by itself and deserves a separate study. The second complaint, to which the rest of this article turns, was that Roman Catholics were against "progress," that they were the potential saboteurs of any measures others might attempt to introduce to improve life in the colony. Before examining the role ideas on progress played in anti-Catholic sentiment let us look first at the more general topic of Victorian era "progress."

Mid-nineteenth-century Nova Scotians, like practically everyone else in contemporary British America, felt they were living in a time of "unparalleled progress of the human race."⁵⁶ Proof of that contention was thought to be borne out by figures showing, among other things, the increase in the number of schools, miles of telegraph lines, and acreage under cultivation. By mid-century, Nova Scotian society seemed to be imbued with a sense of accomplishment about the past and an air of confidence about the future. Solicitor-General A.G. Archibald spoke for most when he rose in the legislature in 1857 to declare that Nova Scotians were "progressing in the elements of mater-

ial culture . . . [with] the wilderness receding year by year before the hand of cultivation, and comfortable dwellings springing up like magic . . . all over the province."⁵⁷

Beneath the fascination with the many improvements of the age—from canals to penny postage to railroads—lay a profound faith in the power of human resourcefulness and determination. Natural resources and geography were thought to be of secondary importance in economic development. The key to prosperity lay in the ability of people to cultivate the virtues upon which “progress” was based: diligence, ingenuity, and self-reliance. As Goldwin French has pointed out, “the transformed individual” becomes “the key to the transformation” of society, and success is determined by the number of transformed individuals who can be created in the desired images.⁵⁸ Not surprisingly, progress-minded colonists came to fear and even despise anything or anyone they suspected of contributing to the growth of indolence. This sentiment manifested itself in many ways, from the widespread aversion for assisted immigrants (individuals who by definition were incapable of self-reliance) to the opposition to the introduction of the secret ballot (which its critics said went against “something in the human breast which requires the independent exercise of a man’s conscience”).

One way in which Protestants justified their contention that Roman Catholicism was invariably opposed to and incapable of “progress” was through the use of specious historical arguments. Claiming history as the ultimate judge of the worth of institutions, they maintained that the history of the Catholic Church revealed a past replete with corruption, crimes, and errors. Reasoning inductively, Protestants argued that neither Catholics nor Catholicism had changed or could change. The *Guardian* expressed this idea particularly well in 1847: “When we see Popery in one place, we see it as it exists in every other place, under every form of government, and in every state of society . . . The Popery of the dark ages of the eleventh and twelfth centuries is the Popery of the present generation, very slightly modified, and a little more corrupted.”⁵⁹

To reinforce the conclusions of their historical analyses, Nova Scotian Protestants added comparisons of the current differences between Protestant and Catholic countries. In their eyes these contrasts demonstrated that Protestant nations were “incontestably” superior in terms of moral and material accomplishments,⁶⁰ and they cited such things as annual totals of books published and total mileage of railway track as proof. The findings were always the same: Protestant areas nourished “progress” while Catholic lands promoted ignorance and lethargy. No allowance was ever made for historical or cultural varia-

tions, nor was any admission made that one could also find poverty and illiteracy in Protestant areas as well.

To a Protestant way of thinking Catholics were incapable of either moral or material "progress" because their religion abhorred self-reliance and self-control. Roman Catholicism, the *Guardian* charged, "breathes out threatenings and curses against those who claim and exercise the privilege of thinking for themselves."⁶¹ In sharp contrast with the freedom and independence encouraged in Protestant congregations, Catholics were thought to be "entirely subjected to the domination of a cunning and grasping priesthood."⁶² Or again, as the Reverend A. King told an 1859 Protestant Alliance meeting, Catholic priests nip "in the bud the first appearance of . . . that assertion of liberty to think and act for himself, which belongs to a man as a moral and accountable being."⁶³

With few exceptions, "popery" and its concomitant tendencies toward a passive acceptance of subjugation were not linked with any special ethnic types (although Irish Catholics were of particular interest to Nova Scotians and other British Americans). The debilitating effects associated with Roman Catholicism were generally presented as universal, latent in all mankind: "Popery, then, is the religion of human nature in its most depraved state. Its design is not to diffuse light, but to perpetuate darkness."⁶⁴ Protestantism, by way of contrast, was a religion that called for rigorous self-discipline and was consequently able to overcome "the pride, and prejudices, and corrupt passions, of our nature."⁶⁵ In this interpretation everyone was a potential "papist" at heart; dedicated Protestants were those who had successfully repressed their inner, innate weaknesses.⁶⁶

For many colonists, therefore, self-mastery held the key both to remaining virtuous Protestants and to making the province prosperous. Of course, the corollary of such faith in the human spirit was that failures were entirely one's own doing. As an editorial in the *Guardian* put it, if Nova Scotia did not "imitate the best examples" and advance rapidly, "the fault is our own."⁶⁷ When it came to the practical application of their homilies and aphorisms on self-reliance, however, Nova Scotians found that a will to succeed is not always enough. Not only was it difficult to keep up with the latest developments in Britain or the United States but the wavering commercial policies of those two nations during the late 1840s and early 1850s clouded all hopes for colonial "progress." The repeal of the Corn Laws (1846), timber duties and Navigation Acts (1849) touched off fears in many colonists that the mother country might abandon them. At the very least, Nova Scotians were losing the economic protection to which they had grown accustomed. The uncertainty Nova Scotians felt during the 1840s

would not abate until closer economic ties were achieved with the United States in the mid-1850s.

The years of accentuated economic anxiety roughly parallel the decade of the most intense Protestant-Catholic tensions in Nova Scotia. And the fear the colonists experienced concerning the uncertain twists of international commercial forces beyond their control was matched by their worries about the debilitating social, moral and economic effects of international Roman Catholicism. Is it not reasonable to suggest that in the prevailing atmosphere of mid-Victorian optimism, many colonists were unwilling, or psychologically unable, to admit inner doubts about their capability to raise their colony's stature *vis à vis* the mother country and the United States. Instead, they projected those anxieties onto their Catholic fellow citizens, depicting them as the inverted image (passive, docile and backward) of the ideal which they set for themselves. Catholics, of course, as the foremost negative reference group in any British society (and one whose beliefs Protestants regarded as a throwback to the dark ages), were well suited for their role as scapegoats during a period of anxiety about successful progress.

This is not to say that the prejudices voiced during the 1840s and 1850s were merely a reflection of worrisome economic conditions. Obviously, anti-Catholic sentiments and stereotypes had been expressed for generations, in good times and bad. Yet the *emphasis* mid-century Protestants placed on the ramifications "popery" held for "progress" did clearly mirror underlying concerns. Most Nova Scotians recognized that there was no guarantee for economic success, and militant anti-Catholics chose to believe that that vulnerability lay in the presence of Roman Catholics in the colony.⁶⁸

In the decades that followed these years of intense anti-Catholic sentiment there would be a gradual cooling of animosity between Protestant and Catholic in Nova Scotia. Slowly, Protestants came to accept Catholics as bona fide Nova Scotians, a group whose loyalty could be trusted and which was capable of making meaningful contributions to the economic and social development of the province.⁶⁹ Nonetheless, from time to time, well into the twentieth century, some of the old fears and suspicions would surface again. Never again, however, have the prejudices so expressed been as intense or as widespread as they were during the 1840s and 1850s.

NOTES

1. Pictou *Eastern Chronicle*, 3 November 1859.
2. For an introduction to anti-Catholicism elsewhere see R.A. Billington, *The Protestant Crusade, 1800-1860, A Study of the Origins of America Nativism* (Chicago, 1964) and E.R. Norman, ed., *Anti-Catholicism in Victorian England* (London, 1968). Anti-Irish conflicts in Canada are described in Michael S. Cross, "The Shriners' War: Social Violence in the Ottawa Valley in the 1830s," *Canadian Historical Review* LIV (1973), 1-26, while anti-Catholic troubles in Saint John are treated in Scott W. See, "The Orange Order and Social Violence in Mid-Nineteenth-Century Saint John," *Acadiensis* XIII, No. 1 (1983), 68-92.
3. J.S. Moir observed that in contrast with the situation in Canada, the Maritimes' "political tradition of 'moderation and harmony' had its religious counterpart in the mutual respect and generally good relations of Catholics and other Christians." Moir, "The Problem of a Double-Minority: Some Reflections on the Development of the English-speaking Catholic Church in the Nineteenth Century," *Histoire Sociale/Social History*, No. 7 (April 1971), p. 57. In *Empire and Commonwealth* (Oxford, 1929), p. 154, Chester Martin wrote that during the struggle for responsible government Nova Scotia was "singularly free" from "the problems of race and worst issues of religion which convulsed the Canadas."
4. John Garner, "The Enfranchisement of Roman Catholics in the Maritimes," *Canadian Historical Review*, XXIV (1953), pp. 203-18, and by the same author, *The Franchise and Politics in British North America* (Toronto, 1969). Terrence Murphy offers a detailed look at the situation of Maritime Roman Catholics during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries in "The Emergence of Maritime Catholicism, 1781-1830," *Acadiensis*, XIII, No. 2 (1984), pp. 29-49.
5. The change of attitude which Thomas Chandler Haliburton underwent provides an interesting case study. In *A General Description of Nova-Scotia* (Halifax, 1823), p. 43, he wrote of the "great loss" felt by all colonists on the death of Roman Catholic Bishop Edmund Burke. Four years later he declared that the Protestants and Catholics of Nova Scotia were living in "perfect harmony." (Quoted in Sister Francis d'Assisi, "Changing Religious Liberty in Nova Scotia, 1604-1827, A Study in Political History," unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Fordham, 1932, p. 86). By 1851, however, Haliburton was attacking "Romanists" with inflammatory rhetoric. See *Rule and Misrule of the English in America* (New York, 1851), pp. 353-54.
6. Gertrude Tratt, "A Survey and Listing of Nova Scotian Newspapers, with Particular Reference to the Period before 1867," unpublished M.A. thesis, Mount Allison, 1957, Part II, p. 30.
7. J.S. Martell, *Immigration to and Emigration from Nova Scotia, 1815-1838* (Halifax, 1942). By way of contrast, the immigrants who arrived at the other ports, Sydney and Pictou, were overwhelmingly Scottish. Most of the Scots were Protestants, though many were Catholics.
8. S.L. Morse, "Immigration to Nova Scotia, 1838-1850," unpublished M.A. Thesis, Dalhousie, 1946, p. 88.
9. Terrence Punch, "The Irish in Halifax, 1836-1871: A Study in Ethnic Assimilation," unpublished M.A., Dalhousie, 1976, pp. 85, 110, 227.
10. A.A. Johnston, *A History of the Catholic Church in Eastern Nova Scotia*, II (Antigonish, 1971), pp. 198-215.
11. The Halifax societies are described in Punch, "The Irish in Halifax....," pp. 212-13. The orders were the Sisters of Charity and the Sisters of the Sacred Heart. See Sister Maura, *The Sisters of Charity, Halifax* (Toronto, 1956), p. 2; and Terrence Burns, "Public School Education of Catholics in the City of Halifax, 1819-1900," unpublished M.A. thesis, St. Mary's, 1962, p. 24.
12. Johnston, *A History of the Catholic Church ...*, pp. 198-215. The first archbishop was the Right Reverend William Walsh, an Irishman who had been Bishop of Halifax from 1844.
13. See Judith Fingard, "'Grapes in the Wilderness': The Bible Society in British North America in the Early Nineteenth Century," *Histoire sociale/Social History*, No. 9 (1972), 5-31, especially pages 13 to 15. See also B. Janusus, "Silas Rand and the Micmac Missionary Society," unpublished honour's thesis, Dalhousie (1973).
14. *Christian Messenger*, 10 September 1847. The *Messenger* was a Baptist weekly published in Halifax.
15. For an excellent introduction to anti-Irish prejudice and the "Irish question" see L.P. Curtis, *Anglo-Saxons and Celts, A Study of Anti-Irish Prejudice in Victorian England* (Bridgeport, 1968).

16. J. M. Beck, in *Joseph Howe, Conservative Reformer, 1804-1848* (Montreal and Kingston, 1982), does briefly discuss the religious aspects of the election (pp. 305, 310), but not to the degree the subject warrants.
17. *The Times*, 29 September 1846. Emphasis in original source.
18. *Halifax Morning Post*, 14 November 1846.
19. It is worth noting that at the time there were no female religious orders represented in Nova Scotia. In 1849 the Sisters of Charity from New York established a convent. Another convent, St. Patrick's, was opened in Halifax in 1857 and the following year St. Peter's convent was set up in Dartmouth. Sister Maura, *The Sisters of Charity, Halifax*, p. 13.
20. *Cross*, 6 February 1847.
21. *Guardian*, 19 February 1847.
22. *Times*, 16 February 1847.
23. Shortly after the "nun" episode the *Messenger* wrote that the Church of Rome "has ever repudiated with horror" the dictates of "reason and common sense." In addition, a recent encyclical letter of Pope Pius IX was reprinted to illustrate that none of the "bigotry, cursing and bitterness of Romanism has disappeared." *Christian Messenger*, 12 February 1847.
24. *Ibid.*, 14 May 1847.
25. *Halifax Morning Post*, 20 February 1847.
26. *Cross*, 13 February 1847.
27. *Cross*, 27 February 1847.
28. For a particularly colourful denunciation of Roman Catholicism see the 10 April 1847 issue of the *Morning Post*, where the paper called Rome the "mother of harlots" and the "untameable enemy of God and religion." As for the name change of the paper, it was made on 1 October 1847. At that time the paper also adopted the vigilant motto "faithful and fearless."
29. The *Acadian Recorder* described the outcry over "Catholic ascendancy" as an obvious Conservative election gimmick (15 May 1847). The *Nova Scotian* explained that the "No-Popery" cry was being raised in the same way that "drowning men catch at straws"; the future of the Tory administration was so hopeless that they had to resort to anything "in the hope of keeping afloat a little longer" (21 June 1847). Liberal papers published outside of Halifax, such as the *Eastern Chronicle* and *Yarmouth Herald*, demonstrated an equally cool initial reaction to the Catholic question. They were, of course, relatively far from the centre of the controversy and the home of most of the Irish Catholics.
30. The *Eastern Chronicle* was one of the few Liberal papers actually to criticize colonial Catholics. It probably did so only because Pictou County Presbyterians were upset about the *Cross's* attacks on John Knox. Yet, even as it denounced the Catholic paper, the *Eastern Chronicle* made sure it placed the onus for the offence upon the Tory press. The Pictou County weekly stated that Conservative journals had unnecessarily provoked the Irish Catholics of Halifax at a time when famine in Ireland was causing them keen "mental distress." (*Eastern Chronicle*, 4 March 1847).
31. Joseph Howe, for one, told a political gathering in Cornwallis that "if any sect tried to establish any ascendancy he should take his bible in the one hand and sword in the other, and resist it to the last." *Morning Post*, 29 June 1847, quoted in D.F. MacLean, "The Administration of Sir John Harvey in Nova Scotia, 1846-1852," unpublished M.A. thesis, Dalhousie, 1947. In Howe's eyes colonial Catholics were not currently seeking to dominate either the Liberal party or the province. But the implication was clear; if they did do so in the future he would be among the first to confront them, which he did less than a decade later.
32. One local development which had a connection to anti-Catholic sentiment in the colony was the formation of the Micmac Missionary Society in 1849. Janus, "Silas Rand and the Micmac Missionary Society."
33. Sample articles and editorials on these religious controversies are located as follows: Papal Aggression Crisis — *Presbyterian Witness*, 7 December 1850; *Christian Messenger*, 20 October 1850; *Church Times*, 6 December 1850. Tractarian movement — *Christian Messenger*, 7 January 1851; *Wesleyan*, 18 October 1851; *Church Times*, 21 January 1851. Father Gavazzi tour — *Presbyterian Witness*, 6 September 1851; *Christian Messenger*, 4 August 1853; *Provincial Wesleyan*, 29 December 1853. Know Nothing movement — *Presbyterian Witness*, 12 May 1855. The *Presbyterian Witness* (10 April 1852), after reflecting on the long history of Protestant-Catholic confrontations, foresaw "the great battle yet to be fought upon the world's arena ... between Protestantism and Popery, and we know that Popery is the main obstacle that exists to the introduction of millennial glory upon the earth."
34. J. B. Brebner, "Joseph Howe and the Crimean War Enlistment Controversy Between Great Britain and the United States," *CHR*, II (1930), 300-27, treats this episode within the

- context of Anglo-American relations. The most recent study of Howe's role in these events is in J. M. Beck, *Joseph Howe, The Briton Becomes Canadian, 1848-1873* (Montreal and Kingston, 1983).
35. Punch states that by 1848 92.5 per cent of the 228 members of the society were Catholic. "The Irish in Halifax," p. 142. Joseph Howe had been president of the society several times, including during the 1847 "Cross controversy."
 36. John Garner, in *The Franchise and Politics*, p. 33, maintains that Howe actually hired the men to do railway work, not military service. He is alone among historians in drawing that conclusion. Whether or not Howe told the men the truth about their ultimate destination is another question. Howe himself said that if the recruits were deceived about going to the Crimea it was not by him but by his agents. *Assembly Debates of the Province of Nova Scotia, 1855-1861*, 9 February 1857.
 37. Howe's feelings of anger and frustration over the recruitment failure were undoubtedly exacerbated by his defeat to Charles Tupper in a Cumberland County election a few weeks after his return to Nova Scotia.
 38. *British Colonist*, 5 and 7 June 1856, quoted in Beck, *Joseph Howe, The Briton Becomes Canadian ...*, p. 109.
 39. *Yarmouth Herald*, 12 June 1856.
 40. *Morning Chronicle*, 27 December 1856. Emphasis in original source. Howe reiterated his position in the legislature, claiming that Protestants had the *right* to laugh at all religious absurdities, be they Catholic, Jewish or Moslem. *Assembly Debates...*, 1855-61, 16 February 1857, p. 105.
 41. Quoted in Chittick, *Thomas Chandler Haliburton...*, p. 413.
 42. The material in the denominational press concentrated on Roman Catholic theology. The secular newspapers aligned with the Liberals tended to adopt the view that if Joseph Howe "thought it necessary to administer a severe castigation" to the Catholics "for their want of loyalty," then they must have deserved it. *Eastern Chronicle*, 19 June 1856.
 43. Joseph Howe, *To The People of Nova Scotia* (Halifax, 1857), pp. 6-9.
 44. A. A. Johnston, *A History of the Catholic Church in Eastern Nova Scotia*, II (Antigonish, 1971), p. 21; quote is from *Eastern Chronicle*, 3 September 1857. See also *Morning Chronicle*, 8 September 1857.
 45. *Morning Chronicle*, 12 November 1857.
 46. In a story in the *Eastern Chronicle* (3 November 1859) the Protestant Alliance in Baddeck was accused of burning two "outstores," causing £300 worth of damage.
 47. Edmund Maturin, *The Claims of the Catholic Church: A Letter to the Parishioners of Saint Paul's, Halifax, Nova Scotia*, (Halifax, 1859); *Presbyterian Witness*, 27 November 1859, 12 February and 19 February 1859; *Christian Messenger*, 15 December 1858; J. M. Cramp (a Baptist), *Scripture and Tradition: a reply to Mr. Maturin's letter on "The Claims of the Catholic Church"* (Halifax, 1859); I. W. D. Gray (Anglican), John G. Marshall (Wesleyan Methodist) and Rev. John Hunter (Free Church of Scotland), *Review of E. Maturin's Letter* (Halifax, 1859); [anon.], *Read and Lend* (Halifax?, 1859?), Maturin, *A Defence of the Claims of the Catholic Church, In Reply to Several Recent Publications* (Halifax, 1859).
 48. *Presbyterian Witness*, 5 February 1859.
 49. *Acadian Recorder*, 20 March 1858.
 50. *Ibid.*, 14 March 1857.
 51. On the part played by the Protestant Alliance see Garner, *The Franchise and Politics in British North America*, p. 34. For contemporary interpretations see *Yarmouth Herald*, 9 February 1860 and C. B. Fergusson, ed., *The Diary of Adolphus Gaetz* (Halifax, 1965), p. 50.
 52. *Morning Chronicle*, 14 May 1859.
 53. Morse, "Immigration to Nova Scotia, 1829-1851," p. 102. Punch, "The Irish in Halifax," pp. 284-7, 355.
 54. Hereward Senior, *Orangeism: The Canadian Phase* (Toronto, 1972). The first permanent lodge was established in Halifax in 1847; by 1850 there were eight lodges in the colony and by 1862 twenty-one, with a total membership of about one thousand. Estimates for Canada West, exaggerated though they were, placed membership there at about 200,000. Kenneth Duncan, "Irish Famine Immigration and the Social Structure of Canada West," *Canadian Review of Sociology and Anthropology* II (1965), 27, 29. In Nova Scotia, ironically, the Orange Order made greater strides after the worst years of anti-Catholicism had passed. It had its own newspaper, *The Burning Bush and British Family Visitor*, throughout the 1860s, and by 1870 there were forty-six lodges in the province. These lodges are listed in *Belcher's Farmers' Almanac for the Province of Nova Scotia...* (Halifax, 1870), pp. 170-1.

55. In "The Irish in Halifax" Punch shows that the Protestant Irish community in Halifax was very small.
56. H. Y. Hind, *Eighty Years of Progress in British North America...* (Toronto, 1863), p. 3.
57. *Assembly Debates of the Province of Nova Scotia, 1855-1861*. A.G. Archibald, 7 February 1857, p. 19.
58. Goldwin French, *Parsons and Politics, The Role of the Wesleyan Methodists in Upper Canada and the Maritimes from 1750 to 1855*. (Toronto, 1962), p. 23.
59. *Guardian*, 21 May 1847.
60. *Provincial Wesleyan*, 14 May 1857. In 1851 the *Provincial Wesleyan* presented figures to demonstrate that Protestant Prussia produced fewer crimes and more students than Catholic Austria and that Protestant Ulster contained one-third of Ireland's population, yet was responsible for only one-sixth of that country's total crimes (15 March 1851).
61. *Guardian*, 4 June 1847.
62. *Ibid.*, 7 May 1847.
63. Reverend A. King, *The Papacy: A Conspiracy Against Civil and Religious Liberty* (Halifax, 1859), p. 17. Andrew King (1793-1874) was a Scottish-born minister of the Free Church of Scotland. From 1848 to 1871 he was Principal and Professor of Theology at the Free Church College and Presbyterian College in Halifax.
64. Reverend J. L. Murdoch, *The Causes Which Since the Reformation Have Led to the Revival and Increase of Popery* (Halifax, 1859), p. 7.
65. *Ibid.*, pp. 4, 6.
66. The *Provincial Wesleyan*, (19 June 1856) claimed that the subjection of humanity's evil tendencies was the chief "work of Protestantism".
67. *Guardian*, 19 January 1849.
68. *Times*, 6 April 1847.
69. Recent scholarship stresses the important role that Archbishop Thomas L. Connolly (1815-1876) played in easing Protestant fears about Roman Catholics during the 1860s and 1870s. See Sister Fay Trombley, "Thomas Louis Connolly (1815-1876), The Man and His Place in Secular and Ecclesiastical History," unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Catholic University of Louvain, 1983, and Punch, "The Irish in Halifax," especially pp. 316-29. By the 1870s even the *Presbyterian Witness*, long wary of Catholics, could express kind words for Archbishop Connolly (28 January 1871) and for a local priest who was active in the temperance cause (25 April 1874).