

## 6. National Volatility and Religious-National Identity

“The United Kingdom is currently severely threatened by break-up due to European federalism, militant Irish nationalism and Scottish nationalism. There is simply no convincing case that British freedom would be preserved in a federal Europe, or that Ulster Protestants would be protected in a United Ireland.”<sup>1</sup>

(King William Loyal Orange Lodge No. 11 )

### 6.1 Introduction

When people say that Orange Parades are sectarian, they really mean that a necessary sectarianism has pushed Orangemen to carry such demonstrations for their own protection. Furthermore, it is because of a necessary sectarianism that the Orangemen have struggled to get involved in politics and influence Ulster society. In Northern Ireland sectarian practices have segmented every aspect of society and social interaction; the RUC now the Northern Ireland Police Service<sup>2</sup>, housing, jobs, their parliament now the Assembly, the clergy, schools, neighborhoods, unions, including Unionist members and Loyalists. In reality, the Orange Order tends to be more Protestant than the Queen. On one side, it wishes a source of legitimacy to consolidate the Protestant rule in Northern Ireland; and on the other side, it works to alienate the Protestant population but under the Order's Protestant standards.

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<sup>1</sup> King William Loyal Orange Lodge No. 11, “The Orange Order and the future of the United Kingdom,” <http://www.orangelodge.mcmail.com/today.htm>

<sup>2</sup> Many members of the Royal Ulster Constabulary were members of the Orange Order. Its disappearance was the result of a Commission to reorganize Policing in Northern Ireland. When that happened reactions by the Orange Order were made public: “The most offensive proposals contained in the Patten Report are the removal of the “Royal” from the force's title with the replacement by a new name - The Northern Ireland Police Service - and the apparent total abandonment of all aspects of Britishness from the ethos, traditions and ceremonial rituals of the force.” Orange Order's opinions on policing can be reviewed at: Grand Orange Lodge of Ireland, “Policing,” <http://www.grandorange.org.uk/press/policing.html>

## 6.2 The Religious Framework of the Orange Order

The social status of the Orange Order in Ulster is twofold; first as a religious institution and second as a political body committed to the support of the Protestant hegemony. From the sum of these two, the Order constructs a cultural setting that self-legitimizes the Protestant nation. Regarding The Orange Order's dichotomy one of the Grand Masters of Scotland once said: "our duties, like our principles, are summed up in two words, Protestantism and Loyalty."<sup>3</sup> In this case the source of the religious ideology of the Orange Order is found in the *Laws and Ordinances of Orangeism*; this includes other instructions such as the *Protestant Landmarks* (see Appendix 2). This is a part of the main precepts:

The institution is composed of Protestants, united and resolved to the utmost of their power to support and defend the rightful Sovereign, the Protestant Religion, the Laws of the Realm, and the Succession to the Throne in the House of Windsor, BEING PROTESTANT and united further for the defense of their own Persons and Properties and the maintenance of Public Peace. *It is exclusively an Association of those who are attached to the religion of the Reformation*, and will not admit into its brotherhood persons whom an intolerant spirit leads to persecute, injure or upbraid any man on account of his religious opinions[...]. An Orangeman should have a sincere love and veneration for his Heavenly Father; a humble and steadfast faith as the only Mediator between God and man[...]. *he should strenuously oppose the fatal errors of the Church of Rome, and scrupulously avoid countenancing any act or ceremony of Popish Worship; he should by all lawful means, resist the ascendancy of that Church*, its encroachments, and the extension of its power, ever *abstaining from all uncharitable words, actions, or sentiments towards his Roman Catholic brethren*[...] he should remember to keep holy the Sabbath day, and attend the public worship of God, and diligently train up his offspring, and all under their control, in the fear of God, and in the Protestant faith[...]. *the Glory of God and the welfare of man, the honour of Sovereign, and the good of his country, should be the motives of his actions.*<sup>4</sup>

The religious content of the Orange ideals sets a precedent for their political posture against Catholics, and against any enemy of the "pure Protestant identity" in Ulster. The Orange Order is considered one of the most conservative and less moderate secret societies in Ulster, where the movement puts on a special performance different from the one performed by it in secular states like the United States. The Orange Institution has been successful in drawing

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<sup>3</sup> *Protestant Landmarks and The House of Orange* (Toronto, Ontario: Maclear and Co., Publishers. St. John, N.B.: R.A.H. Morrow & Co.), 305.

<sup>4</sup> Gray, *Orange Order*, 194-195.

members from the Protestant clergy and probably making of it a movement of “unfriendly Reverends.” Avoiding the religious-political link, in America the Orange movement has been more concerned with social welfare, altruistic and philanthropic issues usually associated with Freemasonry.

The influence of the Orange Order in Northern Ireland suggests that there is also a minimum gap between Church and State and Justice. This can be appreciated in the correlation between the Orange Order, the Protestant political parties and the capacity the Royal Ulster Constabulary had to monopolize law enforcement in Ulster before it was submitted to reform. Many members of the Orange Order are still parliamentarians, paramilitaries, police officers, and common citizens. Those in power were in charge of protection the liberties of the Orangemen and the Protestant community. The rule of law was executed in name of Loyalty and in defense of the Protestant Ulster identity. During Stormont, it can be said that the Orange Order and the Ulster state constituted a real Protestant hegemony despite the social costs.

To date, one of the main complexities of the conflict in Northern Ireland remains the mixed composition of religious and nationalistic feelings in the population. This aspect needs some detailing. Protestants and Catholics are usually defined as homogeneous groups with a common history and identity. However, each religious group is unique in as much as it upholds different religious beliefs, different political affiliation and hence a different national identification. Consequently, Protestants are divided to some extent; they belong to a different Christian church, vote for a different political party and might belong to more than one of the Protestant secret and ritualistic societies.

Amongst these, the Orange Order has prevailed religiously and politically above other movements. But this does not mean that the Orange Order is uniform in its structure, although

for years the Orange Order has been trying to function as a unifying force of Protestants “strengthening the feelings of a Christian brotherhood.”<sup>5</sup> Today it can be speculated that the number of members go from fifty to one hundred thousand Orangemen but there is a feeling that numbers are declining. In Ulster the three main Protestant denominations are formed by the Presbyterian Church in Ireland, being the largest with 20.69% of the population, followed by the Church of Ireland with 15.30% and the Methodist Church with 3.51%; Roman Catholics represent 40.26%.<sup>6</sup> From these, the Church of Ireland is mostly associated with the Orange Order and at a lower level the Presbyterian.

In this context, the conciliatory role played of the Orange Institution has not been successful partly due to its draconian posture against any slightly anti-Protestant-loyal conduct performed by its members of other Christian institutions. In other words, the Orange Order has been deaf to ecumenism with the Roman Catholic Church and any representation of it. From within, Orange Order’ protestant ecumenism has fallen into sectarianism instead of unity.

Sectarianism and division are the diametric forces of ecumenism, and it develops when religious insights are associated exclusively with one particular doctrinal view.<sup>7</sup> In this case it is provided by the exclusivist nationalist ideology and the religious orthodoxy of the Orange Order’s precepts. For example:

[On one occasion] the Order strongly supported the campaign against ritualism in the Church of England and its minor advances to the Church of Ireland. It was opposed because of the traditional Protestant doctrine that salvation could not be by sacraments of the Church, and that the soul needed

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<sup>5</sup> Elaine McFarland, *Protestants First* (Edinburgh, UK: Edinburgh University Press, 1990), 125-126.

<sup>6</sup> “*Northern Ireland Census 2001 Key Statistics, Religion*,”  
<http://www.nisra.gov.uk/census/Census2001Output/KeyStatistics/keystatrep1.html>

<sup>7</sup> Encyclopedia Britannica Premium Service 2004, “Philosophy of Religion,”  
<http://www.britannica.com/eb/article?eu=115494>

no mediator to meet God, and because it was felt that this unscriptural and Romish behavior was betraying the cause of Reformation.<sup>8</sup>

Behind this attitude, the loyalist ideas –the superiority of Protestant Ulster– are discretionally taken to the front as powerful shield and excuse every time the Orange Order has been under threat. Almost everything contrary to the special religion that the Order professes is stigmatized Catholic with the same meaning as Irish nationalist or both. For this conduct the Orange Order has been attributed with adjectives describing his protestant fundamentalism. Still today, it has been associated with Nazism and Ku Klux Klan practices.<sup>9</sup> In one interview Joan Vincent was asked about religion in Northern Ireland to what she responded: “when you say religion you really mean right-wing Protestantism as expressed in the Orange Order and when you say Catholicism you mean all who rebel.”<sup>10</sup> Sectarianism and discrimination then have been the moving forces behind the Orange Order’s protestant-loyalist ideology. Again, containing Catholics seems to be the only rationale of the defense of Protestantism. This condition poses a problem for Orangemen if they were to live in a democratized society free from religious prejudices.

### **6.3 The Orange Order and the Northern Irish Conflict: A Succinct Projection**

As we can appreciate at this point, one of the constants of both Unionist and Loyalists is the compliance with the call to keep the security, the dominance, and the control of the Protestants. As for what concerns to the Orange Order, the religious framework contained in the Law and Ordinances of Orangeism has legitimized a movement that it is based on the coding of the Catholic/Irish/Nationalist enemy. Hence, not only the Orange movement, but Protestant

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<sup>8</sup> Roberts, “Orange Order in Ireland,” 276.

<sup>9</sup> Andrew Finlay, “Defeatism and Northern Protestant Identity,” *The Global Review of Ethnopolitics* 1, no. 2 (December 2001): 7.

<sup>10</sup> Joan Vincent and David Nugent, “A Conversation with Joan Vincent,” *Current Anthropology* 40, no. 4 (August-October 1999): 536.

nationalism relies for survival on the construction of exclusive identities with hostile elements: sectarianism and discrimination.

According to the social functions of religion cited by Jonathan Fox in Chapter Two, Orangeism, Unionism and Loyalism provide an interpretative framework, or belief system, for understanding and delimitating the Protestant world; it contains rules and standards of behavior which guide the actions of believers (abstention from all uncharitable words, actions, or sentiments towards his Roman Catholic brethren); the Protestant religion is associated with institutions like the Orange Order that transmit religious frameworks from one generation to the next; and finally that the Protestant religion can legitimize all forms of actions and institutions for the benefit of the Protestant nation. I would like to emphasize how smoothly Fox's four points fit in the Protestant nationalist profile.

This is not coincidence. As it was stated by Durkheim and recalled by Bruce, religion has a dual character that can be manipulated for political and secular purposes. It has the property of "dividing without and uniting within," which in the case of Northern Ireland has served to separate both Catholic and Protestant communities. Therefore, the religious framework transmitted to the devotees, has been corrupted linking the idea of national identity with political interests. It follows that Durkheim's duality of religious beliefs has been much applied to every aspect of the Northern Irish society. According to Durkheim, a belief distinguishes from the sacred and the profane. In Unionist/Loyalists minds, the sacred is represented by the Protestant nation which contrasts with the profane Irish people.

If this structure of ideas is taken into the political and demagogic spheres, religious institutions or those secular institutions with certain religious goals can be used for mobilizing their adherents for political action and thus facilitating conflict. In Northern Ireland Protestants

and Pro-Protestant Unionist institutions have been strong supporters of the status-quo despite the sectarian warfare. The high levels of polarization reflected in sectarianism and riots have blurred many times the expectations to reach political stability and social peace within the communities. For instance, if the Orange Order, and most right wing loyalists are willing to preserve its superiority in Northern Ireland, what about the Catholic's rights?, should they just leave, join the south or emigrate?, will the killings continue?, what if the Protestant rule is kept for years?. These same questions, that had been raised many years ago, are now troubling the British government.

The victory (2003) of the hard-line protestant DUP has increased the fears of the extension of the conflict. Its leader Ian Paisley (dissident Orangeman), won a majority that just demonstrates the enduring extreme polarization in Northern Ireland. In 1997, elections were won by the UUP lead by David Trimble currently an Orange member. The triumph of the Unionist Party, however, did not mean a risk to the UK. Trimble's agenda was focused on accommodation, pacifying policies and on an equal rights basis for the entire community. Along with Tony Blair and Gerry Adams leader of the Sinn Fein, Trimble signed the Good Friday Agreement after one year of being elected. It is important to notice that the DUP left the negotiation table because the agreement conceded, above many things, the right to Ireland to direct negotiations.

Since 1998 onwards many democratic institutions have been created despite loyalist opposition. Created from Westminster, The Ombudsman of the Police, Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission, Equality Commission for Northern Ireland, and the Public Parades

Commission<sup>11</sup> are the most important democratic reforms, ones that look for a better coexistence for both Catholics and Protestants in general.

These measures seem to be threats to Loyalist and Orange sense of security. For instance, the Parading Commission has restricted the Orange parades. The routes that passed along Catholic areas prone to violence were changed, and this has diminished the symbolism of the institution. This is why many loyal Protestants felt that the Protestant spirit of Ulster had been betrayed by Britain. After the Unionist party committed to peace in 1998 loyalist support declined because many of the provisions were against what they considered Protestantism and because they had agreed to negotiate with the Sinn Fein, the political wing of the IRA.

I would like to aggregate that the triumph of Paisley's ultras seems to be a clear sign of political resentment toward Unionism, and again, towards Catholics associated with his republican nationalist ideas. For this reason betrayal, unbelievable, has been attributed to the Orange Order. Its strong correlation with the Unionist Party makes it look like a responsible as well. Dominic Bryan explains this event: "The fractures within unionist politics have made some loyalists doubt the relevance of the Orange Institution to the loyalist cause. Put simply, the middle class has left because the Institution is too loyal and some of the working class have left because it is not loyal enough."<sup>12</sup>

Despite being criticized by *ultras* The Orange Order maintains its loyalist and sectarian basis. Every Twelfth of July the Grand Orange Lodge of Ireland elaborates a resolution to declare its views and current positions. The 2003 update reads as follows:

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<sup>11</sup> The commission must create a Code of Conduct to regulate the conduct of persons organizing or taking part in a public procession or protest meeting. Her Majesty Stationery Office, "Public Processions (Northern Ireland) Act 1998, Chapter 2," <http://www.northernireland-legislation.hms.gov.uk/acts/acts1998/98002--a.htm#1>

<sup>12</sup> Bryan, *Orange Parades*, 112-113.

**THE FAITH:** As Orangemen we are determined to continue, and strengthen, our witness to the faith which is our heritage from the first Christians and the Protestant Reformers. We deplore the secularism, so prevalent now with its godlessness, its denial of the value and usefulness of religious belief and its refusal to live by the standards of conduct which are its legacy from Christianity.

**LOYALTY:** That we the Orangemen assemble in Commemoration of the 313th Anniversary of the Battle of the Boyne do hereby reaffirm our devotion and loyalty to the Throne and Person of Her Most Gracious Majesty Queen Elizabeth II, Queen of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and Her other Realms, Defender of the Faith. As Her Majesty this year celebrates the Golden Jubilee of Her Coronation we join in the continuing tributes to her devotion and service to the United Kingdom and Commonwealth.

**THE STATE:** Our Loyal Orange Institution, with its proven commitment to the Union, has been constant in its appeal to the unionist parties to work together for their common cause of Unionism. Their attitudes to the Belfast Agreement, positive and negative, divide them. *We have been given ample reason to doubt the sincerity and honesty of the Government of the United Kingdom working in tandem with Foreign Governments (the United States?, the Irish Republic?) and we have deep concerns about their proposals for our future.* Bitter experience has taught us that their attempts to buy off Irish Nationalism and Irish Republicanism has been to the disadvantage and hurt of the Unionist people and the Union.<sup>13</sup>

The 2003 resolution gives us an impression that the Orange Order is not pleased by the UK government but the loyalty to the Queen remains intact. One of the main general critics made to the Orange Institution is precisely the kind of loyalty it abides. If they are so loyal to Britain and find themselves identified with the UK, why don't they comply the British government?, Isn't this attitude disloyal? Part of the explanation is that loyal Protestants as well as the Orange Order's main source of traditional identity, the Crown, and the main source of political legitimacy, i.e. a majority in the Assembly, are losing political power and therefore the Orange lodges are losing supremacy and protection. British commitments to rule from Westminster, on the contrary, have changed the way politics were made with a strong disregard of the Protestant Ascendancy. This kind of liberal power is new for Ulster Protestants and they have had to cope with it. After all direct rule from Westminster represents the real and dominant authority that contains both Catholics and Protestants in Northern Ireland.

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<sup>13</sup>The Grand Orange Lodge of Ireland, "12<sup>th</sup> July 2003 Resolutions, " Orange Resolutions, [http://www.grandorange.org.uk/press/12th\\_resolutions/2003.html](http://www.grandorange.org.uk/press/12th_resolutions/2003.html) emphasis mine.

This means that the “post-imperial principle of respecting the constitutional preference of the majority”<sup>14</sup> is currently bypassed. Such principle has not resolved the problem of protestant hegemony and sectarian behavior. Formerly, Protestants became used to be in power and have the complete support of its parliament. Moreover, the British monarchy had a monopoly of power which in the beginnings of the twentieth century secured the ascendancy of Protestants in Northern Ireland.

In colonial times the Orange movement was supported by English Anglican landowners who boosted its prestige amongst British spheres. Latter, the movement was “appropriated” in conjunction with the development of an Ulster loyalist identity. Ronnie Moore and Andrew Sanders argue that unlike nationalist revolutionaries, e.g. Daniel O’Connell in Ireland, who come from the elite, “Ulster loyalism was essentially a working class phenomenon.”<sup>15</sup> We could imply that sectarian riots and religious feuds acquired a flavor of backwardness from the Irish working classes, whilst the ruling elite in England focused more on Western economic advances and economic progress rather than what it was perceived an agrarian issue.

The Protestants in Ulster started to construct a parallel history along with their paramilitary organizations. Both constructed an identity distorted and focused on the destruction of both Catholics and Protestants. If a date has to be given, is probably at the time of partition when political life acquired a different character; ultra combative.

The United Kingdom’s approach toward Ulster has been in general conciliatory from 1973 until today. The concerns of the Government, under Blair’s administration have been changing the status quo of Ulster Protestant politics. In pragmatic terms the political agenda of

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<sup>14</sup> Ruane and Todd, *Dynamics of Conflict*, 227.

<sup>15</sup> Moore and Sanders, “Loyalism in Northern Ireland,” 13.

the UK in general is not constructed to fulfill imperial needs or expand the British realm on a religious basis anymore.

Other forces have shifted the scope and performance of the British government. British economic growth is one of them. The cost of policing Northern Ireland using the British Army has been high not to mention the cost in lives produced by the combat on terrorism until these days. There is the notion that changing Ulster political culture via democratization is better and cheaper for all instead of direct repression. The prestige of the British government has also been under fire by the increasing power of public opinion. Civil society has also been a growing force that works hard to lobby for peace and cross-communal rights. International conventions on Human Rights have created a standard of good “civilization” making direct pressure over ethnic conflict areas or severely divided societies.

Even the United States’ present war on terrorism, and the disapproval of any kind of religious fundamentalism by many members of the international community, represents a pressure that intervenes in the British decision-making process on Irish matters. The examples above reflect a wide range of issues that are competing today with Protestant domestic pressures like those from the Orange Order’s right to parade in Catholic areas or the DUP recent request to discard the Good Friday Agreement.

Summarizing, from the years of its foundation, the Orange Order was crucial to creating a Protestant Ulster identity within the UK. Its religious values and its political allegiance to the British Crown made it the most important loyal association willing to preserve the pure form of Ulster Protestant nationalism. This could not have reached its levels of expression without the correlation of Catholicism with republican nationalism. References to past glories like the Battle of the Boyne, derived from European battles of empire were explicitly appropriated for the

benefit of the Ulster Protestants. Ideologically the Orange Order have make use of religious frameworks to legitimize grievances and mobilize efforts that are not religious in nature.

The political content of the Orange Order's discourse is a case of leaders who peak not in a wider British national sense but in a narrow-symbolic Ulster Protestant sense. The political circumstances of the peace process are essential for the growth or death of the Orange movement. However, the current supremacy of the hard-line DUP in the Assembly might represent a return to protracted sectarian strife and violence.

“Unless we destroy the [Good Friday] agreement, we will be destroyed forever”<sup>16</sup> Paisley said on a political rally. “We” stands for loyal Protestants, and “We” is also the Orange Order. The scenario for peace is uncertain and there is ample suspicion to believe the Orange Order will not cooperate:

No, he said. I don't see that happening, and I'll tell you why. Because there is a million of us, and we've plenty of arms and we know where we can get more, and we've plenty of money and plenty of friends all over the world. So we'd fight. And we'd probably win. And if we won we'd hand over a united Ireland to the Crown, as a present. But even in the unlikely event that we didn't win, it still wouldn't happen, and I'll tell you why. Because there'd be none of us left. We'd allow ourselves to be wiped out, every man, woman and child, like the Essenes, rather than submit to domination by a Dublin parliament.

Answer of Captain L.P.S. Orr, M.P. Imperial Grand Master of the Imperial Grand Orange Council of the World on being ask how do the Orangemen feel about the prospect of a United Ireland on some basis or other.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Lizette Alvarez, “Firebrand Now in a Position To Shake Up Ulster Politics,” *New York Times*, December 8, 2003 Foreign Desk.

<sup>17</sup> Gray, *Orange Order*, 253-254.