‘*Britishers* and Protestants’: Protestantism and Imperial British Identities in Britain, Canada and Australia from the 1880s to the 1920s

Géraldine Vaughan*
Université de Rouen / Institut Universitaire de France

This article explores the links between the assertion of British imperial identities and the anti-Catholic discourse and practices of a network of evangelical societies which existed and flourished in Britain and in the dominions from the halcyon days of the empire to the late 1920s. These bodies shared a broad evangelical definition of Protestantism and defended the notion that religious beliefs and their political implications formed the basis of a common British heritage and identity. Those who identified themselves as Britons in Britain and in the dominions brought forward arguments combining a mixture of pessimistic interpretations of British history since the passing of the Catholic Emancipation Act with anxieties about ongoing Irish Catholic immigration and an alleged global papist plot. They were convinced that Protestantism was key to all civil liberties enjoyed by Britons. Inspired by John Wolffe's pioneering work, the article examines constitutional, theologico-political and socio-national anti-Catholicism across Britain and its dominions.

In 1860, the French historian Ernest Renan wrote:

> … nearly all colonizing nations are Protestant. Because of its individual character, its simple means, its lesser need to be in communion with the rest of Christendom, Protestantism appears to be the perfect religion for the settler. With his Bible, the Englishman finds in the depth of Oceania the spiritual nourishment that the Roman Catholic

* 34 rue du Fardeau, 76000 Rouen, France. E-mail: geraldine.vaughan@univ-rouen.fr.
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cannot find without the official establishment of an episcopate and a priesthood.[1]

He might have added further that Protestantism provided settlers with a powerful means of attachment to the metropole. Renan's contemporary outlook on the spirit of British imperialism echoes one of the many connections between religion and empire which have since been explored by historians. In the past thirty years, the ties between empire and Protestantism have been studied according to its ideological, missionary and humanitarian facets. Linda Colley's 1992 opus showed how Protestantism had partly 'invented' Great Britain, while the conquest, possession and administration of a common empire held Britons together. The equation of Britishness, Protestantism and imperialism has since been revisited to highlight the diversity of Protestantism and the competing understandings of what it meant to be a Briton in the United Kingdom and its colonies.[2] However, historians such as John MacKenzie have demonstrated how the empire could provide an arena where members of the four nations could both express their different identities and come together as Britons.[3] By focusing on ultra-Protestant societies across Greater Britain, this article seeks to examine how some asserted a Protestant-British identity in a world which they saw as threatened by the aggressive competition of (Irish) Roman Catholicism and growing secularism. In line with the historiographical position adopted by Tony Claydon and Ian McBride, the purpose of this article is 'to redirect attention away

[1] 'Les nations colonisatrices sont presque toutes protestantes; le protestantisme, par sa tendance individuelle, la simplicité de ses moyens, son peu de besoin de communier avec le reste de la chrétienté, semble par excellence la religion du colon. Avec sa Bible, l'Anglais trouve au fond de l'Océanie l'aliment religieux que le catholique ne peut recevoir sans tout un établissement officiel d'évêques et de prêtres': Ernest Renan, 'De l'avenir religieux des sociétés modernes', *Revue des Deux Mondes* 29 (1860), 761–97, at 773.

[2] Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation 1707–1832* (New Haven, CT, 1992). For revision of the Colley thesis from historians focusing on the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, see Joseph Sramek, 'Rethinking Britishness: Religion and Debates about the "Nation" among Britons in Company India', *JBS* 54 (2015), 822–43; Hilary Carey, *God's Empire: Religion and Colonialism in the British World,* c.*1801–1908* (Cambridge, 2011).

[3] John M. MacKenzie, 'Essay and Reflection: On Scotland and the Empire', *International History Review* 15 (1993), 714–39; idem, 'Irish, Scottish, Welsh and English Worlds? A Four-Nation Approach to the History of the British Empire', *History Compass* 6 (2008), 1244–63.

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from descriptions to aspirations … [t]reating protestant nationhood … as an anxious aspiration, rather than as a triumphal description'.[4]

In the 1880s, during the halcyon days of the British empire, a number of ultra-Protestant writers and organizations with imperial networks were anxious to assert the indissoluble link between an imperial Britishness and a Protestant identity.[5] Rather than exploring a specific church, this study concentrates on the anti-Catholic discourse and practices of a number of ultra-Protestant agencies active both in the metropole and across the empire. The Imperial Protestant Federation (IPF), founded by Walter Walsh in 1898, was instrumental in uniting a number of societies under the banner of empire and Protestantism.[6] Thus, amongst others, the Calvinistic Protestant Union (1888), the Scottish Protestant Alliance (1884) and the Women's Protestant Union (1891) in Britain, and the Protestant Protective Association in Canada (1890) and the Australian Protestant Defence Association (1902) in the dominions, together with Orange lodges across the British world, affiliated to the IPF. These bodies shared a broad evangelical definition of Protestantism which affirmed the supreme authority of the Bible, justification by faith alone, salvation through the unique sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross, and regeneration of believers through the action of the Holy Spirit. They also defended the notion that religious beliefs and their political implications formed the basis of a common British heritage and identity. John Wolffe's pioneering study has demonstrated how imperial networks of anti-Catholic societies had elaborated a common defence of

[4] Tony Claydon and Ian McBride, eds, *Protestantism and National Identity* (Cambridge, 1998), 26–7.

[5] The expression 'ultra-Protestant' appeared in the early 1840s (*OED*) and referred to people who put forward extreme views in religious matters. It was inspired by the French use of 'ultras' with reference to the ultra-royalists in early nineteenth-century France. In this article, the 'ultra-Protestant' militants are persons or groups who founded specific religious and/or politico-religious associations, who gave religious issues the highest priority in their *Weltanschauung* and who, arguing that there was an urgency to defend Protestantism, exercised pressure on political circles.

[6] Walter Walsh (1847–1912) was a militant evangelical Anglican journalist, essayist and writer, who launched the *Protestant Observer* in 1888. He was the author of the best-selling *The Secret History of the Oxford Movement* (London, 1898). The societies enrolled within the Imperial Protestant Federation were listed in several reports, such as *The Imperial Protestant Federation, Report for 1899–1900 and A History of the Formation and the Progress of the Federation, to which is appended Information regarding its 27 Federated Organisations* (London, 1900).

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British values across the empire.[7] Those who identified themselves as Britons in Britain and in the dominions brought forward arguments combining a mixture of pessimistic interpretations of British history since the passing of the Catholic Emancipation Act with anxieties about ongoing Irish Catholic immigration and a so-called global papist plot. They were convinced that Protestantism was key to all civil liberties enjoyed by Britons.

This flourishing of ultra-Protestant societies must be set in a wider context of the ongoing Irish migrations to Britain and its empire, as well as the political turmoil manifested around the issue of Home Rule. Rates of Irish emigration since the 1840s had been impressive: by 1881, 5,400,000 people inhabited Ireland, while there were an estimated 3,680,000 living overseas.[8] In 1914, Catholics of Irish descent represented around 25% of the Australian population.[9] Nevertheless, the late Victorian and Edwardian eras were periods when Irish emigration rates were slowing down. Added to fears of an unending stream of Irish Catholic migrants to Britain and its dominions, political debates surrounding the possible advent of Home Rule in Ireland brought anguish to ultra-Protestant observers across the empire. In 1912, Robert Sellar, a staunch Protestant Scots-Canadian newspaper editor, addressed a warning to his compatriots in his *Ulster and Home Rule: A Canadian Parallel*: 'so long as Ireland is united to Britain they [the Protestants] are safe, but the moment the tie is cut and they pass under the government of a Home Rule legislature they will be, as a people, abandoned to their enemies'.[10]

In order to analyse the various forms of anti-Catholicism at work, the categorization adopted here will diverge slightly from Wolffe's typology.[11] An examination of the connection between religious principles and national identities, in the contemporary writings, journals,

[7] John Wolffe, 'Anti-Catholicism and the British Empire, 1815–1914', in Hilary Carey, ed., *Empires of Religion* (Basingstoke, 2008), 43–63. For a recent review of the historiography of anti-Catholicism in a comparative perspective, see Marjule Anne Drury, 'Anti-Catholicism in Germany, Britain and the US: A Review and Critique of Recent Scholarship', *ChH* 70 (2001), 98–131.

[8] Eric Richards, *Britannia's Children: Emigration from England, Scotland, Wales and Ireland since 1600* (London and New York, 2004), 214.

[9] Oliver P. Rafferty, 'The Catholic Church, Ireland and the British Empire, 1800–1921', *HR* 84 (2011), 288–309, at 291.

[10] Robert Sellar, *Ulster and Home Rule: A Canadian Parallel* (Belfast, 1912), 3.

[11] John Wolffe, 'Protestant-Catholic Divisions in Europe and the United States: An Historical and Comparative Perspective', *Politics, Religion and Ideology* 12 (2011), 241–56, at 250; see also idem, 'A Comparative Historical Categorisation of Anti-Catholicism',

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newspapers and archives of these societies reveals three distinct forms of anti-Catholicism: constitutional, theologico-political and socio-national.

Constitutional Anti-Catholicism

Constitutional anti-Catholicism encapsulates all aspects of anti-Catholicism which were state-driven and operated within a legal framework to exclude Catholics from public and civic positions. No further anti-Catholic legislation was adopted in the United Kingdom after the enactment of the Ecclesiastical Titles Bill in 1851.[12] In fact, no *Kulturkampf* took place during mid- and late Victorian times.[13] Yet this did not prevent tensions from resurfacing around the 'true' allegiances of Roman Catholics and their loyalty as British subjects. Accordingly, the Imperial Protestant Federation (1898) prescribed in its revised constitution of May 1901:

> Article 7. To oppose all attempts to:
> a. Alter the Coronation Oath and the Declaration against Transubstantiation
> b. Open the Throne of England to a Romanist
> c. Repeal the Bill of Rights or the Act of Settlement
> d. Throw open the offices of Lord High Chancellor of England and Lord Lieutenant of Ireland to Roman Catholics.[14]

The article did not address any true political or social threat emanating from Roman Catholic milieux but demonstrated how members of the IPF were anxious to position themselves as the guarantors and protectors of the English constitution. Section (d) also confirmed their intention to maintain the political disabilities enshrined in the 1829 Roman Catholic Relief Act. In accordance with section (a), the Church Association and National Protestant League's first question to all candidates for the 1906 General Election was: 'Will you, if elected, resist every attempt to alter or abolish, either the King's Declaration now required by the Bill of Rights, or the Coronation

JRH 39 (2015), 182–202. Wolffe identifies four major categories of anti-Catholicism: constitutional-national, theological, socio-cultural and popular.

[12] This legislation was adopted in reaction to the restoration of the Roman Catholic hierarchy in England in 1850, but never enforced.

[13] Colin Barr, 'An Irish Dimension to a British Kulturkampf?', *JEH* 56 (2005), 473–95.

[14] *Report of the Council of the Imperial Protestant Federation for 1901–1902* (London, 1902), 29–34.

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Oath?'[15] In 1910, the Church Association gathered over one million signatures from petitioners across the British dominions against any alteration of the King's Declaration.[16]

Safeguarding the restriction on Catholic processions prescribed in the 1829 Emancipation Act was key for ultra-Protestant societies. Section 26 of the act forbade Catholic liturgical processions with clergy in vestments. This section was often loosely interpreted by civil and judicial authorities in the late Victorian period, yet crises surrounding the public processions by Catholics resurfaced during the Edwardian era.[17] For instance, in September 1908, during the nineteenth International Eucharistic Congress, the planned procession of the blessed sacrament through the streets of Westminster sparked political turmoil. Ultra-Protestant societies and organizations put pressure on the police and the Liberal government to ban this demonstration of Roman Catholicism.[18] In the end, the Catholic authorities agreed to abandon the procession of the Holy Host, but the undiplomatic handling of the affair led to the resignation of Lord Ripon, a prominent Roman Catholic, as Lord Privy Seal.

Nearly a century after its adoption, parliamentary debates on the removal of major Catholic disabilities testified to the sensitivity of the subject. In December 1926, the Unionist Scottish MP McInnes Shaw argued that:

> In the West of Scotland we feel that not enough is known of this Bill, and the great deal of ill-feeling which has been aroused …. … [T]here are a number of Orangemen in Scotland. They are a very gallant and law-abiding people, but they feel that there is more in this Bill than meets the eye, and for that reason more time should be given for Scotland to digest the proposals.[19]

After some debate, amendments to sections of the 1829 act were adopted by parliament and enforced in Scotland.

[15] London, BL, 3940.g.41, Untitled Church Association and National Protestant League pamphlet (London, 1906).

[16] W. Prescott Upton, *The King's Protestant Declaration: Why it must not be Altered*, Church Association Tract 404 (London, 1910).

[17] As shown by Ian Machin, there had been similar processions in 1898 and 1901 without legal prosecution: G. I. T. Machin, 'The Liberal Government and the Eucharistic Procession of 1908', *JEH* 34 (1993), 559–83, at 561.

[18] Ibid.; see also Carol A. Devlin, 'The Eucharistic Procession of 1908: The Dilemma of the Liberal Government', *ChH* 63 (1994), 407–35.

[19] *House of Commons Debates*, 3 December 1926, vol. 200 col. 1587.

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In contrast, the constitutional position of Roman Catholics was more favourable in the dominions. In the Canadian colonies, the acquisition of French (Catholic) Quebec had led to the passing of the 1774 Quebec Act, which effectively granted freedom of religious practice. With the 1791 Constitutional Act, the legislative assemblies for Lower and Upper Canada permitted Catholics to vote and to become representatives. Legal and political toleration of Roman Catholics varied in each Canadian colony, but on the whole, it was in advance of the British Isles.[20] In the Australian colonies, the 1836 Church Act promulgated by Richard Bourke, the Irish Protestant governor of New South Wales, placed all Christian denominations on an equal footing. This legislation alarmed the Anglicans as it successfully disestablished the Church of England and 'seemed to question the essential link between Church and State which was the bedrock of the British Empire'.[21] Nevertheless, other state-related arguments were brandished by ultra-Protestant bodies, who persistently claimed, for instance, that Roman Catholics were over-represented in official occupations. Hence the Protestant Protective Association in Ontario, founded in the early 1890s, criticized the government because 25 per cent of civil servants were Roman Catholics, whereas their proportion in the general population was closer to 15 per cent.[22]

Another dimension of constitutional anti-Catholicism which emerged from the 1870s onwards centred on the related issues of education, secularization and the state's attitude towards denominational schools. The position of local and central colonial authorities regarding public support for schools varied significantly across the dominions. In Canada, the Manitoba Schools controversy in the 1890s illustrated the strong opposing views on the status of religious instruction in State schools. The Act to Establish a System of Education in the Province of Manitoba (1871) had put in place a system of separate Protestant and Catholic schools. Responding

[20] J. R. Miller, 'Anti-Catholicism in Canada: From the British Conquest to the Great War', in Terrence Murphy and Gerald Storz, eds, *Creed and Culture: The Place of English-Speaking Catholics in Canadian Society 1750–1930* (Montreal, QC, 1993), 25–48. The harshest legal attitude to Roman Catholics was to be found on Prince Edward Island, where Roman Catholics had to wait until 1830 before they had a right to vote and to hold public office.

[21] Peter Cunich, 'Archbishop Vaughan and the Empires of Religion in Colonial New South Wales', in Carey, ed., *Empires of Religion*, 137–60, at 145.

[22] *The Protestant Protective Association in Ontario: History and Principles of the Organization* (n.pl., 1894), 2.

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to the pressure of ultra-Protestant and secularist lobbies in the early 1890s, Manitoba abolished state-supported denominational schools in 1891. This sparked a crisis which was partly resolved by the adoption of the 1896 act, which permitted half an hour of religious instruction in public schools.[23] Nevertheless, ultra-Protestant bodies usually aligned with secularists in asking for minimal or no support from the public authorities for Roman Catholic schools. Similarly, in New South Wales, the Australian Protestant Defence Association declared in its manifesto:

> Under the plea of 'freedom of instruction', Archbishop Kelly has publicly declared his intention to fight for State endowment of Roman Catholic schools. This unquestionably means State aid to religion, and as the control of Roman Catholic Schools is wholly in the hands of the priesthood who are under the direction of the Vatican in Rome, and as the teaching staff consists exclusively of members of so-called religious orders', it means State aid to the most undesirable elements in our community and not the most loyal. This would also involve the disruption of the present admirable system of public instruction.[24]

In the United Kingdom, in the 1920s, similar arguments were brought forward by ultra-Protestant bodies who protested against the 1918 Education (Scotland) Act, which had enabled Catholic schools to become part of the state system while remaining under Catholic clerical control. In its annual report for 1925–6, the Scottish Women's Protestant Union identified three great perils for Scottish society, one of which was the existence of the Roman Catholic schools.[25]

Theologico-Political Anti-Catholicism

This second type of anti-Catholicism encompasses the interconnection of theological and political concerns, particularly around the issues of power structures and authoritarianism. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, theologico-political anti-Catholicism was seen as contiguous with Reformation principles and in line with major evangelical values. Ultra-Protestant associations emphasized

[23] J. R. Miller, 'Anti-Catholic Thought in Victorian Canada', *Canadian Historical Review* 66 (1985), 474–94.
[24] Patrick O'Farrell, ed., *Documents in Australian Catholic History* (London, 1969), 181.
[25] *37th Scottish Women's Protestant Annual Report, 1925–1926* (n.pl., 1926), 1.

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their anti-papal stance by combining theological rejection of Roman Catholicism with an abhorrence of the alleged tyrannical, freedom-destructive and imperialistic views of the Vatican. Classic religious 'errors' ascribed to Roman Catholics were 'transubstantiation, the Sacrifice of the Mass, Invocation of Saints, Purgatory, Prayers for the Dead, Auricular Confession, and Extreme Unction', along with alleged priestly domination, ignorance of the laity and the tyrannical powers of the papacy.[26] 'Provocations' by the Vatican energized the theological anti-Catholic discourse: thus the promulgation of papal infallibility in 1870 and the condemnation of mixed marriages contained in the *Ne Temere* decree of 1907[27] were presented as proofs of the Vatican's sectarian and political agenda. Ultra-Protestant societies thus connected religious and political dimensions in their writings and lectures.

These societies operated within imperial networks in different ways, and one efficient medium was the professional agitators whom they regularly invited to lecture throughout the British Empire.[28] For instance, Charles Chiniquy (1809–99), a former French-Canadian Catholic priest, who had joined the Presbyterian Church in 1860, spent the rest of his life lecturing against the 'Romish' Church in Scotland, Australasia and the United States.[29] Edith O'Gorman, a celebrated escaped nun, lectured across Britain in the early 1880s before travelling through Australasia from 1885 to 1888. In the thirty-fifth edition of her successful autobiography *Convent Life Unveiled* (first published in 1871), she wrote: 'The circulation of my books and thousands of lectures delivered have been the means of arousing the British public to the danger of Rome's aggressive encroachment on the rights of Free Speech, Free Press, and Liberty of Conscience'.[30]

The conviction that the Roman Church was profoundly anti-liberal led to the development of a discourse on the connection between the fight against Catholicism and the preservation of British

[26] 'Solemn Protestant League and Covenant for the British Empire', *Protestant Observer*, May 1902, 68.
[27] Wolffe, 'Protestant-Catholic Divisions', 191.
[28] Donald MacRaild, 'Transnationalising "Anti-Popery": Militant Protestant Preachers in the Nineteenth-Century Anglo-World', *JRH* 39 (2015), 224–43.
[29] *The Bulwark*, September 1892, 3; see also Paul Laverdure, 'Creating an Anti-Catholic Crusader: Charles Chiniquy', *JRH* 15 (1988), 94–108.
[30] Edith O'Gorman, *Convent Life Unveiled: Trials and Persecutions of Miss Edith O'Gorman, otherwise Sister Teresa de Chantal, the Escaped and Converted Nun*, 35th edn (Edinburgh, 1928), vi.

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liberties across the United Kingdom and the dominions. It also prompted a progressive discourse contrary to the reactionary image ultra-Protestant societies sometimes conveyed. These associations were resolutely modern in their propaganda, in the prominent role women played in them and in their official discourse on the progress of Protestant societies. There was thus certainly a liberal and progressive flavour to the theological and political anti-Catholic discourse in Britain. This fits with what Michael Gross has demonstrated concerning the German *Kulturkampf*, which originated not in conservative but rather in liberal circles.[31] The indissoluble link between Protestantism and civil liberties was at the heart of this discourse and was insisted upon especially by colonists who were keen to remain loyal to their British roots. In 1912, the Orangemen of British Columbia sent a copy of an address to their brethren in Ireland, in which they stated: 'The Papacy hates Britain to-day as it hates no other nation on earth. This hate arises from the fact that Britons, as a people, insist on individual liberty'.[32]

Socio-national Anti-Catholicism

In the third type of anti-Catholicism, ethnic prejudices and social considerations coalesced to form a xenophobic discourse which essentialized British identity. As the historian James Miller observed for Canada, 'in the late nineteenth century the emphasis on theological disputation gave way to a nationalistic preoccupation with the social and political implications of Catholicism'.[33] In this form, ultra-Protestant discourse stressed the socially progressive and modern aspect of Protestant Britishness, which was connected to ethnic stereotypes, over against the so-called reactionary character of Catholic nations. The common *Briton-ness* of metropolitans and colonists was supposed to rest on values of social and moral progress which had been fought for since the Reformation. As the Revd Robert F. Horton wrote in *England's Danger* (1899), the Protestant spirit 'since Descartes philosophized and Bacon opened the gates of

[31] Michael B. Gross, *The War against Catholicism: Liberalism and the Anti-Catholic Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Germany* (Ann Arbor, MI, 2004). There is scope for more research on this subject in connection with ultra-Protestant British associations.
[32] *Protestant Observer*, March 1912, 54.
[33] Miller, 'Anti-Catholicism in Canada', 25.

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modern science, has made the progress of human mind'.[34] Thus Catholic countries and their inhabitants were described as backward and illiberal. National stereotypes of the Irish and the French associated the dominance of Catholicism with economic underdevelopment and archaic social structures. It was alleged that Catholic societies remained in a state of poverty partly because they needed to support numerous clergy through tithes and partly because of the superfluity of holy days on which no work was done. In Canada, the Scottish-born Methodist minister George Douglas (d. 1894) held similar views regarding Quebec, which was cited as a possible example of what could happen if French Catholics were not controlled:

> Take a million of the free men of your Ontario and contrast them with a million of our Franco-Canadians, and what is the commercial value of the one as contrasted with the other … . Because the intelligence of the one [Quebec] is stagnant and nil, while that of Ontario is aggressive, and hence the ever-increasing demand with the skilled power of supply.[35]

This view of Catholic backwardness was typical of the contemporary association of low moral standards with poverty; '[a]scribing poverty to laziness and, in turn, laziness to Catholicism evoked a sort of primordial note which few Protestants refrained from striking'.[36] The *Protestant Alliance Official Organ* drew its readers' attention to 'Protestantism as the bulwark of national independence and social freedom … Protestant nations have prospered and grown great, while those that have remained under the blighting influence of Popery have dwindled down and decayed.'[37] In ultra-Protestant discourse, the fear of national decay, which was heightened after the South African War (1899–1902) and various reports on the physical and moral disabilities of the working urban classes, became at times quite obsessive. In this display of anti-Catholicism, ethnic prejudices were mobilized to put forward a common British identity, with an insistence on the masculine and virile qualities of the Anglo-Saxon race. This also expressed itself in demonstrations of anti-clericalism, particularly directed against Anglo-Catholic priests

[34] R. F. Horton, *England's Danger* (London, 1899), 91.
[35] George Douglas, *Discourses and Addresses* (Toronto, ON, 1894), 304.
[36] Roberto Romani, *National Character and Public Spirit in Britain and France, 1750–1914* (Cambridge, 2006), 216.
[37] *Protestant Alliance Official Organ*, January 1898, 1.

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in Anglican churches, who were ridiculed for their love of fancy vestments, incense and bells.[38] Caricatures of tonsured Anglo-Catholic priests could be found in the *Protestant Alliance Official Organ*. For example, in January 1900 a cartoon entitled 'Oil for Troubled Waters' featured two clergymen in a boat. The 'Strong Man', an evangelical minister, addressed a 'Little Man', saying: 'Why, your nonsense about incense, vestments, candles, chasubles, and tunicles has so troubled the waters, that we shall both go down unless you go overboard'.[39]

Amongst the anxieties expressed regarding loyalty to British identity, the fear of Irish domination was present in the colonies and regions where their migration had been significant. Thus promoters of the Australian Protestant Defence Association wrote in *The Watchman* in 1902: 'We are Britishers, and we have no desire that Australia should become a second Ireland, dominated by men who are never so happy as when they are in league with Britain's enemies'.[40] Thus anti-Catholicism acted as the best defence against the contamination of deleterious (worldwide) Irish and (Canadian) French influences. Also, within the colonial world, competition with French missionaries heightened a sense of urgency, in particular in connection with the indigenous inhabitants of Canada and on the Pacific islands. Accordingly, only imperial unity could act efficiently against papist influence, whether Irish or French, as the Canadian writer W. A. Armstrong asserted in the 1880s: '[i]f we British Canadians are to remain freemen, we must check the encroachments of the Romanists. To do so, there is in fact but one course open to us – the unity of the Empire.'[41] By asserting common British values, ultra-Protestant colonists were anxious to preserve what they considered as Anglo-Saxon values, that is, industriousness and progress. In turn, British associations in the United Kingdom relied on their colonial counterparts to maintain and preserve Britishness at home. In 1906, the Imperial Protestant Federation claimed to include 1.6 million members and 57 societies, of which a third were in the dominions.

After the First World War, there was a revival of this type of anti-Catholicism, both in Britain and in the dominions. Scotland was

[38] Hugh McLeod, 'Varieties of Anticlericalism in Later Victorian and Edwardian England', in Nigel Aston and Matthew Cragoe, eds, *Anticlericalism in Britain* c.*1500–1914* (Stroud, 2000), 198–220.
[39] *Protestant Alliance Official Organ,* January 1900, 295.
[40] *The Watchman* (Sydney), 1 February 1902, 4.
[41] [William R. Armstrong], *Essay on the Times: Canada, 1887* (n.pl., 1887), 23.

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particularly affected by this resurgence. The campaign waged by the Kirk following the 1923 General Assembly Report on *The Menace of the Irish Race to our Scottish Nationality* targeted Scots-Irish Catholics for nativist and ecclesiastical reasons.[42] The offensive by the Kirk, which specifically claimed to be *ethnic*, because it targeted Irish nationals, and not religious, was set in a wider British and European context of mounting nationalisms. In Scotland as well as more generally in Britain, as convincingly demonstrated by R. M. Douglas, the 1916 rising and the Irish war of independence racialized attitudes to the Irish.[43] Douglas characterizes in this manner the racial prejudice which resurfaced against the Irish at the time of the partition of Ireland:

> With the withdrawal in 1921 of the Irish Free State from the United Kingdom … there seemed little advantage to be gained from continuing to proclaim the miscibility of British and Irish stocks. To the contrary, assertions of the racial incompatibility of the two peoples now served both to provide an explanation for Britain's failure to assimilate the Irish to Anglo-Saxon norms, and to assuage the wounded amour-propre of the nation whose identity Ireland had so brusquely repudiated. The 1920s thus witnessed the growth, to a degree unseen since the mid-1880s, of a tendency to characterize the Irish in racial – and usually derogatory – terms … .[44]

Douglas also argued that anti-Catholicism was not a component of the rise of anti-Irishness in Scotland. Yet, from the perspective of ultra-Protestant societies active in the 1920s, there was definitely a religious trigger to the socio-national rejection of Roman Catholics. It might be argued that there was in fact a combination of anti-Catholic and nationalistic concerns which sparked off some aggressive campaigns and demonstrations against Irish-born residents and people of Irish descent. The Scottish Protestant League, founded in 1920 by Alexander Ratcliffe, issued a leaflet entitled 'Who Fills our Prisons?' during the 1929 General Election Campaign:

[42] Stewart J. Brown, '"Outside the Covenant": The Scottish Presbyterian Churches and Irish Immigration, 1922–1938', *InR* 42 (1991), 19–45; David Ritchie, 'The Civil Magistrate: The Scottish Office and the anti-Irish Campaign, 1922–1929', *InR* 63 (2012), 48–76; Thomas M. Devine, *The Scottish Nation 1700–2000* (London, 2000), 498–9.
[43] R. M. Douglas, 'Anglo-Saxons and Attacotti: The Racialization of Irishness in Britain between the World Wars', *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 25 (2002), 40–63.
[44] Ibid. 43.

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> There is an immediate need for legislation to control the influx of Irish Roman Catholics, who are imported into this country to snatch the jobs from Protestants and to help the Romish Church Romanise the country … for legislation to control the importation of undesirable Roman Catholic Irishmen, who are becoming a menace to the moral and spiritual welfare of the country and a heavy burden on the rates and taxes …[45]

Ratcliffe's arguments were a typical nationalistic mixture of rejection on the grounds that Irish migrants were a labour-snatching, demoralizing and pauperized population.

The necessity of maintaining an imperial connection between anti-Catholic movements dwindled during the inter-war years. After the death of Walter Walsh in 1912, the IPF struggled to survive in the late 1910s and early 1920s.[46] But the slowing down of the IPF's activities was essentially due to mutations within the dynamics of anti-Catholicism. With its flexibility, the anti-Catholic stance had adapted to the various colonial contexts and could be mobilized for purely local purposes, with at times only a vague reference to a common British background. Outside the colonies, anti-Catholicism was a transatlantic movement which resurfaced in the United States within extremist associations such as the Klu Klux Klan.[47] Within the United Kingdom, the plasticity of anti-Catholic discourse and practice allowed it to be incorporated into rising nationalist discourses, especially in Scotland.

Conclusion

From the 1880s up to World War I, the imperial project of ultra-Protestant societies across the British world revolved around the maintenance of Protestantism and anti-Catholicism as the pillars of a common Britishness. Ultra-Protestant bodies were convinced they

[45] BL, 8142.i.14, Scottish Protestant League, *General Election Leaflet no. 7* (Falkirk, 1929).

[46] Wolffe, 'Anti-Catholicism and the British Empire', 567.

[47] See, for instance, John Higham, *Strangers in the Land: Patterns of American Nativism 1860–1925* (New Brunswick, NJ, 1955); Justin Nordstrom, *Danger on the Doorstep: Anti-Catholicism and American Print Culture in the Progressive Era* (Notre Dame, IN, 2006); Philip Jenkins, *The New Anti-Catholicism: The Last Acceptable Prejudice* (New York, 2003).

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were fighting an enemy who had an imperial agenda, as Walter Walsh wrote in the IPF Report for 1899–1900:

> Rome knows that by weakening Protestantism in the British Empire she will paralyze it everywhere, and her emissaries are labouring day and night with this object in view. … We are face to face with a deadly foe, which will not be content to live with us on terms of equality …[48]

In some respects, these societies presented reactionary features, particularly with their determination to revert to a pre-1829 position and their exaltation of the virtues of an idealized Reformation past. Nonetheless, they were eager to appeal to the urban middle classes and presented a discourse which was meant to be liberal, modern and progressive. The leaders and organizers of these societies resorted to all modern means for the greater and faster propagation of their ideas – newspapers, pamphlets and books; women were actively employed in various capacities, and preachers were regularly invited to address the masses.

The plasticity and adaptability of anti-Catholicism was manifest in the progressive relinquishing of the imperial connections during the inter-war era. The three types of anti-Catholicism presented in this article (constitutional, theologico-political and socio-national) broadly corresponded to successive time periods, and the first two types were definitely losing ground by the late 1910s. By contrast, socio-national anti-Catholicism, which was particularly adaptable to different colonial and metropolitan contexts, thrived in the 1920s and early 1930s. In a context of rising European nationalism and successful racial theories, it could be mobilized to exclude the Irish from the nationalist project (Scotland, Australia) or to discard French influences (Canada). Further exploration is needed into the diminishing references to a common Britishness in ultra-Protestant bodies across the Commonwealth in the 1930s and into the links between the growth of secularization and the history of ultra-Protestant agencies in post-World War II societies.

[48] *The Imperial Protestant Federation, Report for 1899–1900* (London, 1900), 16.

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