

Unit 10: Video 3 Transcript

Q6: Why was Toronto given the nickname “Belfast of Canada”?

A: Is or was Toronto the “Belfast of North America”? I mean, it was an easy way to describe a city that was primarily Protestant. I mean, only about 15 to 17 percent of the population of the province was Roman Catholic in the 1850s and probably less than that in the city of Toronto. And the city of Toronto was dominated by one of the scions of Irish Protestantism, and that was the Loyal Orange Order. And the Order had a presence right across British North America, but was focused in a number of major cities in the province. So, for example, Kingston had so many Orangemen, they called it “the Derry of North America” and Toronto the Belfast.

And why is that? Well, for a time, the Orangemen, as an organization, engaged close to two-thirds of the male Protestant population. It ceased to become an Irish organization, and it became a Protestant organization that declared itself loyal to the Crown above all. Loyal to the principle of an open Bible, and the freedom of religion. Loyal in terms of being loyal to one and other, because it was a fraternal benefit society as well. And in many areas of the province, it served that more than anything else. And the idea is farmers helping farmers, creating community where it was hard to create community on the frontier. In Toronto, though, I mean the Orange Order becomes so powerful that it begins to dominate things like the local police force, the local fire department. In fact, some fire halls substitute as Orange Lodges at the time. They also, in a sense, start to take over the apparatus of civic government. So it’s not unusual to have an Orange mayor of Toronto and many counselors who are Orange.

Now what does this do to the local Catholic population? Well, Belfast, Derry and Northern Ireland, that scenario. They become a minority, and a minority that is not terribly wanted in those areas. So, for example, the Orangemen would not want to advance Catholic rights in any way, shape, or form. Catholics were considered inherently disloyal, because it was assumed that their first loyalty was to the pope of Rome and not to the crowned head of the British Empire. They were not to be trusted politically. They were not to be trusted economically. If you were an Orangemen, you were not to shop at a Catholic shop. You were not to marry a Catholic woman, but I mean solid research has shown that in the latter part of the 19th century, Catholics and Protestants were marrying one and other in greater numbers in Toronto than previously assumed. In fact, cupid was probably more popular than the pope

or the Orange mottos in terms of love relationships between members of the city. So the Orange Lodge is powerful.

There are clashes. The 1850s becomes a bitter time, particularly in Upper Canada. The issues are many. The way in which the Ultramontane movement is unfolding in Europe. It's well-known here that Pope Pius IX—"Pio Nono" to those who love him; "Pio No-No" to those who don't like him—is advancing the church militant and triumphant. Missionary orders are going all over the world. There's a resurgence in Catholicism. And this is frightening to those who see, at least in Upper Canada, there's this huge Catholic province next door, Lower Canada. And this "European problem" could come here and is coming here. The fact that, for example, the Catholic Church is reestablished in places like the Protestant Netherlands or, worse, in Anglican and Methodist Protestant United Kingdom. And the new diocese is called the Arch Diocese of Westminster. "How dare the Catholics do something like that, to take the very name where our houses of Parliament are?" So this "papal aggression" is greatly feared. And as Catholics advance their rights in the Canadas, in Upper and Lower Canada, it appears as though this papal aggression is coming here as well. And, for example, in the form of Catholic separate schools, although there was a reciprocal relationship on the other side of the Ottawa River in Lower Canada for Protestant separate schools. That's often forgotten. But also, Catholics asserting themselves in the Parliament where both Lower and Upper Canada were squished together in this dysfunctional constitutional model that was intended to be unilingual where Protestants dominate. And now political allegiances in both languages are the order of the day. So there's great anxiety in Upper Canada about the Catholic presence and particularly the growing migration after the Famine of a Catholic population.

It's not surprising, then, that in the 1850s, we see heightened rhetoric in papers like the *Toronto Globe*. We see violence in the streets, often times on those special days, July 12th for the Orangemen, when King Billy and his surrogate ride on the white horse and lead the parade through the streets of the city, and there's trouble that follows. Or on St. Patrick's Day when the Irish decide that they'll have their processions. Or on the feast of Corpus Christi at the end of June when the Eucharist is paraded around the bounds of the cathedral. Violence breaks out. People are killed. People are injured. And this goes on for a time, even after Confederation. During the Jubilee Year of 1875, the Catholics, in honour of the Pope's Jubilee, march through the streets of the city and they're literally attacked by Orange mobs. And it's only the police department, which is interestingly a mixture of Catholics and

Protestants, that act as a human barricade between the rioters and the processors.

So these are symptomatic of both local problems, old world problems, and the irreconcilable, it seems, theological differences between Catholics and Protestants. This will dissipate over time. This is not something that imprints itself permanently on the Canadian landscape. Because as Catholics and Protestants work together in communities, as they join the same unions, as they marry one another, and as they come to some sort of common vision in whatever way it manifests itself in any particular time, they do see that they actually have more in common. Particularly if Catholics speak the English language. And by the turn of the 20th century, we have cleavages that are noticeable within the Catholic Church based more on language than any other consideration. French on the one side, English on the other.