

A Politico-Religious Incident in the Career of Thomas D'Arcy McGee

by

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The Montreal *True Witness* of February 25, 1859 printed a letter from the Rt. Rev. Ignace Bourget, Bishop of Montreal, which in clear terms paid the highest kind of compliment to that journal and its editor, George Clerk.¹ Bourget pointed out that the *True Witness* had his approval as a paper dedicated to the defence of Catholic principles and rights, and that any rumors to the effect that it did not enjoy clerical approbation were unfounded. He directed Montreal Irish Catholics to support the *True Witness*, even if this meant overlooking opposition to it from certain sources. The letter had been read on the preceding Sunday from the pulpit of St. Patrick's church, one of the several English-language Catholic churches in Montreal.

The opposition, while not mentioned by Bourget in specific terms, is not difficult to locate. First, regarding rumors concerning the relation between the *True Witness* and the Catholic clergy of Montreal, we find a brief notice in the Toronto Catholic weekly, the *Canadian Freeman*, of February 11, 1859. The *Freeman* notes that the honourable Georges E. Cartier, Lower Canadian leader of the Macdonald-Cartier government, stated in the course of debate during the current legislative session in Toronto, that the *True Witness* did not speak for the Catholic clergy of Montreal.² One is roused to curiosity about what lay behind Cartier's statement.³ Given the fact that the bishop of Montreal felt constrained subsequently to give public support to the *True Witness*, obviously something important was at issue. It is the situation behind these preliminary facts which we wish to examine.

The editor of the *Canadian Freeman* provides some enlightenment in a subsequent elaboration of the background to Bishop Bourget's defence of the *True Witness*. In his issue of March 4, the *Freeman's* editor, James Moylan, disclaimed any intention of either embarrassing the *True Witness* or of verifying the truth of Cartier's assertion, contending that his original note was printed solely for the information of his Montreal confrere. Moylan was pained at the violence of the *True Witness's* denial of the Cartier remark, especially since the denial constituted an attack on the *Canadian Freeman*. But he expressed a desire not to quarrel with the *True Witness* and its editor.⁴ Nevertheless, the seeds of what was to be a violent journalistic altercation had already been sown; and the focal point of what came to be considered a most unseemly row between the two leading Canadian Catholic journalists of the day can easily be introduced by mentioning the name of the junior

¹ *The True Witness*, February 25, 1859.

² *The Canadian Freeman*, February 11, 1859.

³ *The True Witness* disputed whether or not Cartier actually made the remark attributed to him by the *Freeman*; see *The True Witness*, February 18, 1859.

⁴ *The Canadian Freeman*, March 4, 1859.

legislative member from Montreal, Thomas D'Arcy McGee. On the subject of McGee and his policies Moylan and Clerk were vigorously opposed; Moylan was a strong supporter of McGee, while Clerk came gradually to be one of his most outspoken critics. Further, it was on the question of support or opposition to McGee that the problem of the backing given the *True Witness* by the Montreal Catholic clergy becomes both interesting and instructive.

In the same issue in which Clerk attacked the rumors of his having fallen from ecclesiastical favour and the *Canadian Freeman* for having printed the rumors, the *True Witness* carried an article outlining its difficulties in supporting the political behaviour of Thomas D'Arcy McGee. At this juncture Clerk was simply incredulous that McGee should be considered a political ally of "Clear-Grit" leader, George Brown. Unity between McGee and Brown in opposition to the present administration, granted; but unity in political principle between a Catholic and anyone of Brown's known attitudes was unthinkable:

... from the same authority (the Toronto *Colonist*) we learn with pleasure that though he (McGee) in common with Mr. Brown was opposed to the present Ministry, "he could not vote for the measure which Mr. Brown advocated". This fully confirms all that the *True Witness* has ever said upon the subject of a "Brown Alliance". The thing is simply an impossibility, without the grossest dereliction of principle. That alliance supposes unity of political action among the contracting parties; but no true Catholic can vote for Mr. Brown's measures, as Mr. McGee, according to the writer in the *Colonist*, asserts; and so it follows that the Catholic cannot be a "Clear-Grit", or the ally of the "Clear-Grits". He may have in common with them antipathies; but it is impossible that betwixt the Papist and the Brownist there should be any sympathies ...⁵

A major factor in the *True Witness's* inability to accept the political views of George Brown was Brown's violently anti-Catholic stand on the question of Catholic schools in Canada West. The editor of the Toronto *Globe* was opposed in principle to any but secular schools, and for the past eight or nine years had missed no opportunity to say so.⁶ To this Clerk, as a Catholic, naturally found himself in opposition; and his attitude was quite in conformity with his often-expressed intention of defending Catholic principles.⁷ Obviously, on the question of separate schools, there was a "Catholic position," requiring the existence of Catholic schools, regardless of what might be called political considerations. But Clerk's opposition to George Brown extended to more than Brown's views on education. And while there was no doubt in Clerk's mind that his attitude was on all counts dictated by religious principle, Clerk clearly did not receive universal support among Catholics.

A few months after the *True Witness's* criticism of the *Canadian Freeman* over the Cartier incident, the Toronto Catholic paper indicated that the gap then existing between itself and the *True Witness* was caused by more than the coolness produced in Moylan by Clerk's unwarranted rebukes of mid-February. While Moylan expressed regret over the new state of affairs, he indicated that now political considerations divided him from Clerk:

... the mistake of the *True Witness* is simply this: the *True Witness* defines Politics to be,

⁵ *The True Witness*, February 18, 1859.

⁶ See F. A. Walker, *Catholic Education and Politics in Upper Canada*, pp. 76-90.

⁷ Walker, *op. cit.*, pp. 105-107; 130; 139; 147-148; 213-214; 220.

a seeking for place and pension, or individual position; and he divides Upper Canada between John A. Macdonald and George Brown. If you are not a place-beggar, you must have no party alliances whatever. This is Mr. Clerk's view of our action and obligations, stripped of all verbiage, and reduced to the simple form of a proposition.

Now there cannot be, with any intelligent man, who has lived some time in Upper Canada, a moment's hesitation in pronouncing this view partial, one-sided and unreliable. . . . No, the policy of the *True Witness* is not founded on knowledge of Upper Canada. It could tend, if adopted, to strengthen our enemies, embarrass our friends, and retard our progress.⁸

On the other side, a political meeting in support of McGee, held in Montreal on May 16, gave the *True Witness* an opportunity to become very explicit in its increasingly strong reaction to the political relations between McGee and Brown. In an editorial comment in his next issue after the Montreal meeting, Clerk employed some of his strongest language against McGee, at the same time taking a very dogmatically "Catholic" stand on the controversial representation by population issue of the day:

... we reply that we look upon every man as the enemy of Catholic Lower Canada, and therefore our political enemy, who gives, in appearance even, the slightest encouragement to the agitation in favour of "representation by population", or who does not condemn that measure as "unjust in principle", and that we denounce him especially, who, calling himself a Catholic, countenances a political change which would, by increasing the number of Protestants in the Legislature, be speedily and inevitably followed by the fullest establishment of Protestant Ascendancy ...⁹

A month later Clerk reached the height of his invective against McGee and the representation by population issue:

Our opposition to Mr. McGee's advocacy of "Representation by Population" as applied to Canada, has brought out in his support, and in support of the principles he advocates, the two great champions of Protestantism in Upper and Lower Canada, respectively: we mean the *Globe* and the *Montreal Witness*. We congratulate Mr. McGee as a Catholic on his new-found friends; and point to their advocacy of "Rep. by Pop." as a conclusive proof that it is essentially an anti-Catholic measure;

... The Catholic who can win a good word from the *Globe* or the *Witness* must be a traitor to his religion and a rank hypocrite (the deletion is of a lengthy editorial from the *Globe* in support of McGee) . . . And with regard to Mr. McGee in particular, we tax him also with want of honesty in his advocacy of "Rep. by Pop".¹⁰

⁸ 8. *The Canadian Freeman*, April 29, 1859. Moylan's tone was still very temperate and respectful regarding Clerk and the *True Witness*. In his following issue, Moylan returned to the same theme. Beginning with a call for charity, fairness and lack of invective in discussion, he expressed concern that he should find himself at odds with the editor of the *True Witness*, and went on to re-emphasize the possibility of Catholics maintaining a middle position politically between the present Conservative administration and the "Clear-Grit" opposition of George Brown: *The Canadian Freeman*, May 6, 1859.

⁹ *The True Witness*, May 20, 1859.

¹⁰ *The True Witness*, June 24, 1859. Later, Clerk indicated privately that his dislike of McGee was personal. In a letter to Bishop Horan of Kingston, June 26, 1865, he declared that he could never trust McGee, a man of "low habits,"

The *True Witness*'s opposition to McGee had been growing steadily since early in March. The opening blast was a letter published in the *True witness* on March 11, and signed "an Irish Catholic."¹¹ Written by a Montreal lawyer, Bernard Devlin,¹² the letter heaped abuse on McGee for his relations with George Brown and also condemned the Montreal legislator for support given to Toronto Irishmen in their recent decision to forego a St. Patrick's day procession in the Upper Canadian capital.¹³ While the *True Witness* made no comment on the Devlin letter, it did subsequently repeat the criticism Devlin levelled at the Toronto Irish for alleged failure to assert their rights and national honour.¹⁴ About the same time, Clerk ran several articles voicing fears about the widespread existence of anti-Catholic secret societies in Ontario.¹⁵

Moylan saw only too clearly that the increasingly disputatious contents and attitude of the Montreal Catholic paper were having harmful effects in the Upper Canadian province. Through the columns of the *Canadian Freeman* he repudiated the notion that anything but prudence had dictated the decision regarding the March 17 public procession in Toronto,¹⁶ and he challenged the *True Witness* to state facts and names to substantiate its dire warnings about secret society activity in Ontario, pointing out that Clerk's allegation on this score had been gleefully taken up by the Protestant press in Upper Canada and used against Ontario Catholics.¹⁷ But since the publication of the Bourget letter of approval, Clerk apparently had become convinced

who "brought disgrace on all with whom he was connected," who "made a beast of himself whenever he can get the liquor"; see Walker, *op. cit.*, p. 240, Note 59.

¹¹ *The True Witness*, March 11, 1859. The most concerted attacks on McGee do not begin until April. But beginning with the *True Witness* of April 22, there is an almost unbroken series of increasingly violent Clerk editorials against McGee and the *Toronto Freeman*.

¹² Devlin wrote a second letter to the *True Witness*, this one signed, acknowledging his authorship of the March 11 letter; see *The True Witness*, April 8, 1859. The second letter repeated the charges of the first, and claimed further that McGee's published reply to the first was uncomplimentary to the Irish. The McGee letter was published by *The Canadian Freeman*, April 1, 1859. The *Freeman* of April 15 noted that Devlin was a respected Montreal Catholic lawyer; and while Moylan stated that Devlin's interpretation of McGee's behaviour was incorrect, the editor of the *Freeman* was quite respectful to Devlin; *The Canadian Freeman*, April 15, 1859.

¹³ *The Canadian Freeman* replied to this charge of failure of Irish Catholic nerve in Toronto on April 8, 1859.

¹⁴ *The True Witness*, April 1, 1859. Clerk, however, did publish an editorial repudiating the offensive tone of Devlin's first letter; *The True Witness*, April 1, 1859. Moylan, unappeased, took the view that Clerk should have refused initially to publish the letter at all; *The Canadian Freeman*, April 8, 1859.

¹⁵ *The True Witness*, April 15, April 22, 1859.

¹⁶ *The Canadian Freeman*, April 8, 1859.

¹⁷ *The Canadian Freeman*, April 22 and April 29, 1859. Cf. *The Canadian Freeman*, July 1, 1859

of the universal validity of his own opinions, and he was not to be deflected from what he conceived to be his moral responsibility as a Catholic journalist to insist on a strong policy line for all Canadian Catholics.

Clerk's increasing hostility to McGee also evoked a reaction from the *Canadian Freeman*, which felt obliged again to criticize the *True Witness* for presuming to advise Upper Canadians on political matters that affected properly the upper province. In its defence of McGee against Clerk's accusations, the *Freeman* of May 27 charged that McGee had been wilfully misrepresented in the *True Witness*.¹⁸ Clerk immediately engaged the *Canadian Freeman* as an opponent, and wondered how Moylan could acquiesce in McGee's support of Brown in the face of the latter's anti-Catholic stand on separate schools. The *True Witness* even suggested broadly that the *Freeman* had itself forsaken support of the principle of separate schools as the price of following McGee in his association with Brown.¹⁹ Moylan's reaction was one of outrage. He pointed out that in the forty-four issues which constituted the complete output of the recently-established *Freeman*, there had been nearly fifty-one columns on the separate school problem, all voicing the strongest support of Catholic demands for adequate school legislation in Ontario.²⁰ By this time the battle between the two papers was fairly joined; and the issue was clearly seen to be support or opposition to McGee and the political policies for which he stood. Several months earlier the minor question of Toronto Irish Catholic courage or prudence divided the two journals; but now the matter was much more serious, and its political consequences more important.

The *Canadian Freeman* remained decidedly unimpressed by the strictures of Clerk against McGee and advocacy of representation by population. On June 17, it published the first of four letters from McGee to Moylan, with the general and illuminating title: *Four Letters to a Friend: the Relations of the Irish Catholics of this Province to the French-Canadian Parties and the Protestant population of Lower Canada, and the Conservative parties of Upper Canada, considered*.²¹ The remaining three letters were published in subsequent issues of the *Freeman*, on June 24, July 1 and July 8, and their contents amply fulfilled the promise of their title.²²

¹⁸ *The Canadian Freeman*, May 27, 1859. Moylan's tone, by this time, has become more biting: "...we took the liberty to say some weeks ago, that the continuance of the culpable controversy he now seems resolved to fasten on Mr. McGee by hook or crook, must injure, if not destroy the usefulness of the *True Witness*, in this section of the Province... We heartily desire to see the usefulness of both Mr. McGee and the *True Witness* preserved entire and unimpaired: but our Montreal contemporary may rest assured of one thing, that if the Irish Catholics in this Province have to choose – if the choice is forced on them – between himself and Mr. McGee, the lot will not fall on him..."

¹⁹ *The True Witness*, May 13, 1859.

²⁰ *The Canadian Freeman*, May 20, 1859. Cf. *The Canadian Freeman*, June 3, 1859.

²¹ *The Canadian Freeman*, June 17, 1859.

²² This series of letters presents a formal explanation of McGee's political views, and for that reason is of prime importance for an accurate estimate of his position. However, I have not seen fit to consider the letters directly, for two reasons: 1) their very length and completeness would require a treatment

While Moylan published them without comment, none was needed. Meanwhile, public meetings began to be called among the Irish in Upper Canada in support of McGee, counterparts to the Montreal meeting of May 16;²³ and it became obvious that a division had developed among Canadian Catholics over support of, or opposition to, Thomas D'Arcy McGee.

Whereas formerly the major rallying point for Catholic political power in Canada had been the issue of Catholic schools in Upper Canada, a specifically religious issue, now the issue on which political unity among Catholics was being sought was much less obviously wedded to Catholic religious or theological convictions: it was the issue of representation by population. True enough, the principal advocate of Catholic political unity, the *True Witness*, trading on its recently publicly-approved position as *defensor fidei*, was very explicit in its insistence that this issue was primarily a religious one. Representation by population was described by Clerk as the first step towards the establishment of "Protestant ascendancy" in Canada, and all the horrors that could be conjured up from such an abstraction of a political state of affairs were promised if the Brownites succeeded in bringing about this constitutional change. However, the *True Witness* was by no means successful in aligning all Canadian Catholics behind its opposition to McGee, as the attitude of Moylan's Canadian *Freeman* clearly showed. Moylan, for his part, became increasingly outspoken in his criticism of Clerk and his defence of McGee.²⁴

But if Clerk was not able to win the universal support of Catholics to his views concerning McGee and the issue of representation by population by either sweet reasonableness or invective, there proved to be another means at his disposal for this task. In the *True Witness* of July 22 a succinct but devastating attack was made on the *Canadian Freeman*. It came in the form of an argument from authority, and was designed to place Moylan and the *Canadian Freeman* beyond the pale of ecclesiastical approval:

... We have it, therefore, on authority to state that, so far from its being true, as boasted of by the Toronto *Freeman*, –that the policy of that journal is generally approved of by the Clergy, it has been generally repudiated by the Catholic Episcopacy of the Province. In proof of which we are permitted to adduce this conclusive fact –That the *Canadian Freeman* of Toronto has already been or is immediately about to be rejected by every Bishop in Canada; that it is no longer received by any Bishop in the Lower Province; and

extending far beyond the practical limits of this paper; 2) for present purposes, which attempt to focus attention on the attitude of the Canadian Catholic hierarchy towards McGee at this time, it is less important to know in precise detail the considered opinion of McGee himself, than the position attributed to him by his critics.

²³ Public meetings in support of McGee were held in Upper Canada, during the months July-September, 1859 in the following communities: Simcoe, St. Thomas, St. Catherines, Kinkora, Hamilton, Kingston, Lindsay, Stratford, Caledonia, Prescott, Downeyville, Dundas, Indiana, London; see *The Canadian Freeman* issues of July, August, September, 1859. The major McGee rally was held in Toronto on September 28; see *The Globe*, September 29, 1859; cf. *infra*, p.

²⁴ *The Canadian Freeman*, July 22, 1859. An excellent summary of Moylan's side of the controversy appeared in the *Canadian Freeman*, July 1, 1859.

that it has been sent back to its publisher by every Bishop in the Upper Province, with the exception of the Bishop of the Diocese in which it is published. The boast, therefore, of the *Freeman* is utterly unfounded ...²⁵

This article, clearly based on advance information from some Montreal clerical source, foreshadowed what was soon to be the climax to the Clerk-Moylan controversy. Moylan in rebuttal, considered that Clerk's attack constituted something of a low blow. But while he defended himself against Clerk's accusation that the *Freeman* claimed to represent the feeling of Upper Canadian clergy by denying that he had ever made this claim, he was forced to admit, at least by implication, that his hierarchical backing was slight.²⁶ What support Moylan had among the clergy rushed to his defence. The *Canadian Freeman* of August 5 published a lengthy and strongly-worded letter defending Moylan's part in the *Freeman-True Witness* controversy, signed by the Very Rev. J. M. Bruyère, Vicar General of the diocese of Toronto.²⁷⁽²⁷⁾ And McGee himself, the object of the controversy, attempted to effect

²⁵ *The True Witness*, July 22, 1859. Cf. *The Canadian Freeman*, July 1, 1859.

²⁶ Moylan asserted that he never claimed to speak for the hierarchy, that the only basis for the *True Witness's* statement was a sentence in one *Freeman* editorial on July 1, to the effect that "the great majority of the clergy and people west of the Ottawa, who are the best judges of their own affairs, were with us."

Regarding hierarchical support for the *Freeman*, Moylan claimed that the archbishop of Quebec was the only Lower Canadian bishop ever to subscribe to his paper (the implication seems to be that the archbishop had cancelled his subscription); that, of the bishops of Upper Canada, those of Bytown (Guigues) and Kingston (Horan) had requested discontinuance of their *Freeman* subscriptions, the former offering reasons of economy, the latter giving no reason; that the subscription of Bishop Pinsonneault of London was discontinued by Moylan himself during the time when Pinsonneault was in Europe; that Bishop Charbonnel of Toronto was an ardent supporter of the *Freeman*; while Bishop Farrell of Hamilton was of a like mind with Charbonnel on the separate school issue, and had had his faith in the Lower Canadian politicians shaken over their failure to implement Catholic demands for adequate school legislation; *The Canadian Freeman*, July 29, 1859.

²⁷ "...There is no law, that I know of, which compels one section of the Province to submit to the dictation of the other. We have long enough borne with the taunts of our Eastern opponents. The time has come for us to express our sincere and candid opinion on the subject at issue. I allude to those long and unrelenting attacks of a portion of the press of Lower Canada, against those of this section of the Province, who deem it their right to advocate views and opinions in opposition to the behest of our would-be masters ... The editor of the *Canadian Freeman*, and Thomas D'Arcy McGee, have been chosen as the most conspicuous targets at which the shafts of abuse and insult are daily levelled ... That the course of morality and religious education has been nobly and perseveringly supported by the truly Catholic editor of the *Canadian Freeman* and Mr. McGee, M.P.P., no one, but a narrow-minded and jealous censor will attempt to deny ... *The Freeman has fallen out with the True Witness*, it is said. Whose fault is it, I ask? The origin of this scandalous and protracted pique is

in directly a reconciliation between himself and Clerk. He did so at the instigation of Bishop Charbonnel of Toronto.²⁸

But the issue had run to term in Montreal; and on August 14 Bishop Bourget published a second letter on the subject, this time to be read from the pulpits of all the English-language Catholic churches in Montreal. The letter, designed to give “direction in matters involving principles, and affecting religion,” contained four major points on which Bourget passed judgment: 1) representation by population – opposed “in our present political and social condition”; 2) the voluntary principle, that is, the theory of complete separation of church and state, “as laid down by the subtle enemies of your religious institutions” – opposed; 3) any “proposal for a mixed, reformed and improved school system” – opposed, the only acceptable school system being that of Catholic separate schools; 4) any efforts by politicians “through malice (to) foment prejudices of race” – condemned. Bourget stated further that the *True Witness* of Montreal consistently asserted the position of the Catholic hierarchy on all these counts.²⁹

anything but creditable to the editor of the Montreal journal... To Mr. McGee we are indebted, in a great measure, for the spirit of forbearance and liberality which has succeeded the bigotry and fanaticism, which but a few years ago, raged with fury in Upper Canada ... But, add the detractors of Mr. McGee, this gentleman has joined the enemies of religion, order and society. He has associated himself with the Clear Grit party. This charge against the junior member for Montreal betrays only the ignorance and stupidity of those who seek thus to injure him without just cause. The Clear Grit cry is a bug bear, intended to frighten out of their wits the old women of Lower Canada. Much ado is made about nothing; a cloud of dust is raised, in order to blind the simpletons. In Upper Canada, we know what to think of the one-eyed monster...”; *The Canadian Freeman*, August 5, 1859.

²⁸ “My Dear Lord: – In accordance with your suggestion, I yesterday called on Mgr. Laroque (auxiliary bishop of Montreal), with whom I had a lengthy interview, the whole object of which was your own motto – *pax, pax*... On general politics, such as the issues between Upper and Lower Canada, I found his Lordship very strongly French-Canadian, as is but natural; however, I trust he received my own explanations of my course, in good part. At all events he seemed to agree, that there was no necessity of Mr. Clerk getting into any controversy with me, on public grounds, and that the personalities removed, there was no insuperable bar, to the restoration of peace and good feeling...”; McGee to Charbonnel, August 10, 1859, *Charbonnel Papers, Archives of the Archdiocese of Toronto*.

²⁹ The Bourget letter was reprinted in *The Globe*, August 23, 1859. McGee made a point by point reply to the manifesto, in a letter to Charbonnel: “1) Rep. by pop’n I have already four times voted against, when unaccompanied by real not “pretended” guarantees. I do believe such guarantees can be found satisfactory to Upper and Lower Canada, but if the statesmen of Canada fail to find, or finding fail to adopt them, I should still resist such a change shorn of its legitimate complement.

“2) The voluntary principle “as laid down by the enemies of our religious institutions”. I never could adopt but that same principle, as it is acted on, in Ireland and in the United States, and Upper Canada, by Irish Catholics

What made this letter so significant, aside from its being a thinly veiled attack on McGee, was that it was signed by all the Catholic bishops of Upper and Lower Canada. Moylan claimed in his own defence that he could still maintain his former views, without acting contrary to the ecclesiastical directives of the Catholic bishops, and that he still in fact enjoyed ecclesiastical favour. But his best efforts in this regard were none too convincing, since they consisted in the publication of a general letter of approbation from Bishop Charbonnel dated several months earlier, which Charbonnel's signature on the Bourget manifesto could be considered to vitiate.³⁰

The Toronto *Globe*, meanwhile, did not miss an opportunity to comment unfavourably on the bishops' declaration. And, significantly, Brown used the Bourget letter to emphasize the immediate need to reconsider the nature of the political relations between Upper and Lower Canada. He maintained that the Bourget manifesto exemplified the baldest kind of clerical dictation from the hierarchy of Lower Canada, and that under such conditions there was no hope for the continuance of political union between the two Canadian provinces. His suggested alternative was a form of "confederation" among the two Canadas and the Northwest territory.

The Roman Catholic hierarchy in Canada have more than once interfered in political affairs with a freedom which would not be tolerated by the laity of any other religious body on the part of its ministers. Their last movement, however, is the most open and wanton exercise of unwarranted authority by clergymen of which we have any example . . . The Catholic Church looks upon Representation by Population – that is giving one man in Upper Canada as much power as one in Lower Canada – as "Protestant Ascendancy", and it calls on its people to resist it to the death. Protestant Canadians, Upper as well as Lower, and even Orangemen, join in the cry and denounce those who have maintained the rights of the people of the West. There are some persons, we

I always admired. I could be, however, no party to intending it where it is unknown, though I desire to see it flourish where it already exists.

"3) On the great question of Education I may observe that the Montreal organ of their Lordships has done me the honour to say, that the Catholic view of that question was first properly put before Parliament by me; the propositions I maintained in the debate of June 1858, so spoken of I have not abandoned.

"4) As to "prejudices of race" I fully concur with the sentiment of the declaration, and I shall be, at all times, most desirous to do everything in my power, to abate this radical evil, in our present state of society, in Canada"; McGee to Charbonnel, September 24, 1859; *Charbonnel Papers, Archives of the Archdiocese of Toronto*.

³⁰ *The Canadian Freeman*, August 26, 1859. The same issue of the Freeman contained a second letter from Vicar General Bruyère, defending McGee and Moylan, and some correspondence between Bishops Charbonnel and Bourget relative to the Bourget manifesto of August 14; see *infra*, pp. 11-12. In fact, Moylan continued to maintain the same views after the publication of the Bourget manifesto as he had held previously. In the September 9 *Freeman*, he began a series of three editorials on "the Voluntary Principle in the History of Catholicism," the remaining two being published on September 16 and 23; and the September 16 issue also contained a lengthy editorial on "Public Opinion and Ecclesiastical Authority." Moylan's opposition to the *True Witness* was as strong as ever in the *Freeman* issues of August 26 and September 2, 1859.

suppose, who would like to go on arguing and reasoning with these people, who would like to persuade the Bishops that Representation by Population is not Protestant ascendancy, who would like to make British Lower Canadians believe that it is in their interest to ally themselves with Upper Canada – we are not of that number... A separation of the existing union between Upper and Lower Canada, and a confederation of the two with the North West territory, are the only measures which will rid us of the baneful domination of Lower Canada, while securing all the common advantages of the present union. We believe that it will require less effort to bring about these changes than to secure Representation by Population, and they will be more effectual, while the latter would be a mere stepping stone to further alterations. The declaration of the Catholic Bishops tells us to what we must submit, as long as we remain in our present condition. The Clergy have spoken, and a large majority of the people will obey. They will perpetuate as long as they can, the domination of Lower Canada, with its attendant evils, the ruin of our finances, and the demoralization of our people.³¹

Even after the Bourget manifesto of August 14, McGee and Moylan enjoyed a slight measure of clerical support in Upper Canada. Vicar General Bruyère of Toronto published a second letter in the *Canadian Freeman*, on August 26, which made use of the verbal generalities of the bishops' letter in attempting to show that its strictures did not apply to McGee and Moylan. At the same time Bruyère repeated his earlier criticisms of the uncharitable and imprudent behaviour of George Clerk:

...It affords great pleasure to me to be able to say that our excellent editor of the *Canadian Freeman*, from the first day of its existence, has as a general rule, endeavoured to adhere to the wise regulations laid down by their Lordships the Bishops of Canada, for the guidance of Catholic writers in this Province ...

It is sincerely to be hoped that the able, talented editor of the *True Witness* will for the future, adhere more carefully to the wise regulations set down for his guidance by their Lordships the Bishops of the ecclesiastical province of Canada. Had he confined himself to the discussion of the religious topics specified in the *Resolutions* and *Declaration*, we should not have to deplore the lamentable breach of Christian charity, too frequently perpetrated by this otherwise exemplary and sincere Catholic writer ... Purely local or political interests were strictly interdicted to his pen. By encroaching upon forbidden ground it has occasionally given offence to Upper Canadians, whose circumstances and local interests cannot be well known to, or appreciated, but by such as live in their midst. It has been wisely provided that the *True Witness* should carefully respect *persons*, especially those in authority. By overlooking, in some instances, as it is maintained in Upper Canada, this prudent injunction, the same talented editor of the *True Witness* has, on more than one occasion, yielded to his otherwise laudable zeal, by delivering rather severe lectures to some public men, in whose ability and integrity Upper Canada reposed, I may say, unbounded confidence, because their character and measures are better known here than in the Eastern Section of the Province...³²

Perhaps the most significant aspect of the second Bruyère letter was the generally accepted notion that its publication had the approval of Bishop

³¹ *The Globe*, August 23, 1859. Cf. *The Globe*, August 27, 1859. Criticism of the bishops' manifesto was also voiced by the *Berlin Telegraph*, reprinted in the *Globe*, September 7, 1859; the *Brantford Expositor*, reprinted in the *Globe*, September 5, 1859; and the *Sherbrooke Gazette*, reprinted in the *Globe*, August 30, 1859.

³² Bruyère's casuistry here drew a *Globe* editorial, which took obvious delight in the spectacle of political division in Catholic ranks; *The Globe*, August 27, 1859.

Charbonnel.³³ An almost certain inference from this is that Charbonnel had second thoughts about his earlier signature on the bishops' statement. That Charbonnel had not wished to see a blanket condemnation of McGee by the bishop of Montreal is evident from correspondence between himself and Bourget, conducted before the appearance of the Bourget manifesto, and released by Charbonnel to the *Canadian Freeman* for publication on August 26.

...I subscribe to your declaration, provided you have the charity to suppress the following words x x x x. And that Mr. Clerk, in the same number of the *True Witness* mention his regret of having lost sight of the four articles of your declaration so as to pain the Catholics of Upper Canada, in regard to the *Freeman* and Mr. McGee, promising that henceforth he will be more circumspect towards others.³⁴

But Charbonnel had been outmanoeuvred on the whole issue; and while he did his best subsequently to make it clear that he still supported McGee,³⁵ from mid-August, 1859 McGee had to conduct his political career from under one of the strongest ecclesiastical condemnations ever levelled against a Canadian Catholic politician. The fact of the matter was that, with the exception of Bishop Charbonnel in Toronto, McGee had fallen from favour in the eyes of the Catholic hierarchy of both Upper and Lower Canada. The *True Witness*'s "explanation" of July 22 was substantially correct. Bishop Farrell of Hamilton explicitly supported the *True Witness* and repudiated McGee on the occasion of a banquet held in McGee's honour in Toronto on September 28.³⁶ And a personal letter of Vicar General Bruyère to

³³ The *Globe* asserted this view; *The Globe*, August 27, 1859. And it was subsequently confirmed by Bruyère himself in a private letter to Bishop Pinsonneault of London; cf. *infra*, p.

³⁴ *The Canadian Freeman*, August 26, 1859. The reply of Bourget, also printed in this issue of the *Freeman*, declines very carefully to acquiesce to Charbonnel's request for a Clerk apology to Moylan and McGee, on the grounds that the Bishop of Montreal considered these two at least as culpable in the affair as Clerk; and that therefore it was not fair to require an apology only from Clerk; *The Canadian Freeman*, August 26, 1859.

³⁵ Charbonnel had an opportunity to do this publicly on the occasion of the great McGee banquet in Toronto, September 28, 1859. While not in attendance himself, he allowed his vicar general to occupy a prominent place at the head table; and he sent a remarkable letter of regret for his absence: "... Were my presence necessary to protest against certain misrepresentations about Mr. McGee, I would not hesitate to make an exception to my habit of not visiting a meeting of this kind. But his views, and votes on education, voluntaryism, and even representation by population are so well known to us, that the Rev. Clergymen of Toronto will have the pleasure to state at the Banquet that all acknowledge in Mr. McGee a true, practical friend of the principles and institutions of the Church"; reprinted in the *Globe*, September 29, 1859.

³⁶ In a letter to the press shortly after the Toronto McGee banquet, Farrell took pains to state that his absence from the affair had not the same reason behind it as that of Bishop Charbonnel: "... My views are now, and always have been, those expressed in the letter of His Lordship the Bishop of Montreal, to which, with all the bishops of the Province, I subscribed; and ... I deem no man,

Bishop Pinsonneault of London, dated September 15, 1859, indicated that both Pinsonneault and Bishop Guigues of Ottawa also were in accord with the Bourget condemnation as directly applicable to McGee:

... Even your Lordship's (i.e. Pinsonneault) views which are in direct opposition to my own convictions are entitled to my most profound respects. ... my letters before being sent to the press were carefully read by His Lordship (Charbonnel) who gave it as his opinion that they contained wholesome truths which would be unpalatable to a certain number, particularly in Lower Canada, where they would not be understood. Of this I have ample proof, as I have been condemned by some who have not so much as read me. Witness Bishop Guigues who wrote to His Lordship here that I had charged all Lower Canadians with violating the laws of the Church, whilst I had used the expressions "several, not a few Lower Canadians" ...³⁷

This letter of Bruyère to Pinsonneault is one of the most revealing documents relative to the whole incident. Not only does Bruyère state frankly his sympathy for McGee and Moylan, he also draws some inferences about the contemporary political situation that bear a strong resemblance to conclusions reached by George Brown from the same facts:

... I have strongly and honestly protested against the unjust and uncharitable course of the True Witness ...

Your Lordship says: "Can no means be found out, to rally all Catholics around the standards of their common mother Church so fiercely assailed now-a-days?" I answer: the discovery of such a scheme is simply an impossibility. The union of both sections of the Province is the primary and most fruitful cause of the evils complained of. The separation or disunion of Lower from Upper Canada is the only remedy. The union is pernicious to Lower Canada and very little beneficial to us. Time and union among Catholics of Upper Canada will easily compensate for the slender advantages we derive from our present connection with the Eastern portion of Canada... As long as the unnatural union of both sections will last, there will be discord, division, antipathy. The sooner the frail link is snapped asunder, the better for Religion, peace, charity ... No wonder that the laity and inferior clergy are at variance, since the bishops themselves of the Eastern and Western sections disagree among themselves. So it will be till the apple of discord is removed by the severance of a discordant union ...³⁸

The Bruyère letter does more than offer explicit evidence of the split among the Canadian Catholic hierarchy over Thomas D'Arcy McGee's political views; it also gives an echo of George Brown's conclusion on the advisability of terminating the political union of the two Canadas. Like Brown, Bruyère was convinced that the

whatever his recommendations may be, a fit leader of the Catholic body, and, least of all, of Irish Catholics, who advocates publicly and pertinaciously, a line of policy in direct antagonism with the principles thus publicly recommended to the faithful by the united voice of their First Pastors ... I cannot close this explanation without recording my full approval of, and confidence in, the course pursued by the Montreal *True Witness*. The principles of its gifted and most distinguished Editor, G. E. Clerk, Esq., are truly Catholic; ..."; reprinted in the *True Witness*, November 18, 1859.

³⁷ Bruyère to Pinsonneault, September 15, 1859; *Charbonnel Papers, Archives of the Archdiocese of Toronto*.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

entrenched attitude of Lower Canadians towards the issue of representation by population, especially the view of the Catholic hierarchy of the eastern section, and their insistence that all Catholics support them in this view, was a perfect illustration of the inherent weakness of the political union of the two Canadas. Bruyère agreed with Brown that the time had come for a dissolution of the union, and this for the benefit of the citizens of Upper Canada, Catholic as well as Protestant. He was simply not convinced that the best interests of Upper Canadian Catholics would be served by their continuing to derive their political strength from automatic alliance with their Lower Canadian co-religionists.

Bruyère and Charbonnel, it seems, had little or no support for this position from other Upper Canadian clergy, at least among the hierarchy.³⁹ However, it is a matter of historical record that the rank and file of the Irish Catholic laity of Upper Canada continued to support their political hero, McGee, even after the Bourget condemnation.⁴⁰ Thus the purpose of the Bourget manifesto to deprive McGee and his policies of Catholic political support was in fact not achieved. And it may well be conjectured whether subsequent events, which saw the dissolution of the union of the two Canadian provinces and the advent of confederation, did not prove the Irish Catholic supporters of McGee more politically realistic than the majority of their spiritual leaders of the late 1850's.

³⁹ I have some hesitation in listing Bishop Horan of Kingston with the opponents of McGee at this time. The hesitation does not stem from any concrete indication that Horan ever supported McGee, but from a lack of sufficient evidence that he was opposed. True, he signed the Bourget manifesto; but so did Bishop Charbonnel. There is some indication that Horan was later on terms of personal friendship with Clerk: see *supra*, Note 10.

The attitude of the lower clergy is something I have not determined; but my suspicions are that at least the Irish lower clergy in Upper Canada, and probably others as well, supported McGee.

⁴⁰ The continued political success of McGee is some indication of his continuing to receive Irish Catholic support. And certainly the mass meetings in favour of McGee, held virtually everywhere in Upper Canada at this time, evidenced a strong popular support for McGee among Irish Catholics in the upper province; cf. *supra*, Note 23.