

The Guelph Novitiate Raid: Conscription, Censorship and Bigotry during the Great War

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1. INTRODUCTION¹

At 9:30 on the evening of June 7, 1918, a contingent of military police approached the Jesuit Novitiate of St. Stanislaus, located four miles from Guelph, Ontario. Captain A.C. Macaulay, Assistant Deputy Provost Marshall from London, Ontario, commanded the squad in search of young men evading military service. When he had deployed his men around the building the captain and two assistants made their presence known and were admitted to the novitiate residence. He proceeded to advise Fr. Henri Bourque, S.J., Rector of the novitiate, that all the inhabitants were to be presented before him within five minutes or a thorough search of the premises would follow. The occurrences of the next five hours, including the arrest of three novices, one of whom was the son of the Canadian Minister of Justice, touched off a bitter controversy which was finally stilled only with the Report of a Royal Commission investigation in November of 1919.

The dispute highlighted the intensity of feeling accompanying the introduction of conscription, and the difficulties encountered in attempting to enforce the Military Service Act. It also revealed tensions and problems within the federal cabinet and between two of the key departments responsible for the war effort and for securing men for the ranks. At several stages the question of press

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ensorship predominated, revealing some of the difficulties involved in the experiment to control Canadian news and comment during the war, particularly when that news concerned highly inflammatory domestic questions. Primarily, however, the incident exposed questions of religious differences and threatened to develop a serious sectarian division at a time when the country was already labouring under the difficult racial cleavage arising out of educational disputes and the war effort. The divisions encouraged the renewal and continuation of earlier religious animosities, particularly on the part of the Orange Lodge. Before proceeding to a broader coverage of the events of the raid itself, this paper develops some of the background to the incident. It then considers both the immediate and later reactions to the investigation, concentrating on the religious, social and political factors involved and leading to the Royal Commission Enquiry. The paper ends with a brief consideration of the findings and Report of that Commission and some conclusions to be drawn from the incident.

2. BACKGROUND

a. The Military Service Bill and 'Exceptions'.

Prime Minister Borden returned from Europe in the Spring of 1917 convinced that something drastic had to be done to increase Canadian troop strength in France. His subsequent political decisions, including the introduction of the Military Service Bill, and the manner in which the federal election campaign of 1917 was conducted, contributed to heightened racial, religious and cultural tensions within the country.

The introduction of compulsory military service began with a long and sometimes angry debate in the House of Commons in the summer of 1917. The act originally followed the United States' precedent of excluding divinity students from conscription. However, some Orange Members of Parliament had heard of Montreal disturbances led by students they mistakenly believed to be Catholic seminarians, and they wanted to insure that these students would be punished by the legislation. The members successfully persuaded Borden to drop the exclusion clause. Justice Minister Charles Doherty, a Montreal Catholic, wished to maintain the clause in order to protect both Roman Catholic and Protestant students. At one point in the ensuing negotiations it appeared as though

Doherty would resign over the issue,² but he was finally persuaded that the bill would give sufficient protection to Catholic students. With the aid of the Apostolic Delegate, the Justice Minister was then able to overcome the considerable ecclesiastical opposition to the bill.³

As finally passed into law the act included the two original lists of *exemptions* and *exceptions*. Exceptions included: "Clergy, including members of any recognized order of an exclusively religious character, and ministers of all religious denominations existing in Canada at the date of the passing of this Act."⁴ The distinctions recorded with regard to exceptions would appear clear to Catholics. They would understand that students preparing for the priesthood do so in degrees, being enrolled as clerics with the reception of tonsure, some months after they had commenced their theological studies. Accordingly, these 'divinity students' would also qualify as 'clergy'. Catholics would likewise understand that members of an 'exclusively religious' community were technically and theologically distinct from clergy, divinity students or ministers. Protestant divinity students became 'clerics' or 'ministers' only with the completion of their studies and so, throughout the period of preparation, remained subject to conscription. Altogether, the persistence of the Orange members had succeeded only in insuring that Protestant divinity students would be conscripted.

The operation of the act first touched on the Jesuit novitiate in Guelph in November of 1917 when Henry Westoby, the local Military Representative, requested that members of the religious community present themselves for medical examination. The novitiate solicitor, Patrick Kerwin, sought a definite ruling from the justice ministry through his law partner, the Hon Hugh Guthrie, Canada's Solicitor General. In reply M. Doherty wired Guthrie "...members of recognized Religious Orders are, under Section 2 and the schedule to Military Service Act excluded from its operation. They are therefore not bound to make application for exemption. Am asking that the Military authorities be communicated with."⁵

² *Borden Papers*, P.A.C., July 14, 1919. Courtesy of Professor Craig Brown.

³ *Ibid.*, August 2, 1917.

⁴ "The Military Service Act," Ottawa: The King's Printer, 1917.

⁵ Charles J. DOHERTY, *Guelph Novitiate Enquiry: Evidence Taken Before the Royal Commission Appointed to Enquire into the Action Taken with Regard to the St. Stanislaus Novitiate, Guelph, Ontario, Supreme Court of Canada, Ottawa, August 25, September 9-12, 1919*, p. 253, Copy, Jesuit

This response was referred to Westoby who refused to accept the ruling and continued to push his request.

The resulting exchange of letters and differences of opinion suggests an abominable state of communications within and between federal departments and ministries. While Westoby may be commended for following procedure, it seems incredible that he would refuse to accept the judgement of the man responsible for the administration and enforcement of the Military Service Act. His subsequent actions suggest that he contributed considerably to local misunderstandings.

Rather more serious in its implications, however, is the impression that the 'Military Authorities' either did not receive, or chose to ignore Doherty's ruling. Some of the confusion, no doubt, arose from the fact that the act was being enforced by two separate bodies, the Department of Justice, through the Dominion Police, and the Department of Militia and Defence, through their Military Police. The shared jurisdiction caused so many problems that a reorganization occurred in late May of 1918, placing the enforcement arm of operations under Militia and Defence.⁶ The final transfer of power, from Justice to Defence, took place just days before the Guelph affair. The coincidence of the transfer and the raid appeared to support later Catholic allegations that the affair was deliberately concocted as an attempt to embarrass both the Minister of Justice and the Catholic population. This atmosphere of conflict between the departments contributed considerably to a sense of dissatisfaction within the country. It combined with the negative atmosphere which had already developed as a result of quarrels over language questions in the preceding years, and the bitter debate over conscription. A brief review of Catholic perceptions at the time, and of some events accompanying the election campaign of 1917, reveals the steady growth of a sense of religious division.

b. A Divisive Sectarianism and the 1917 Election

Archives, Toronto.

⁶ Regarding defaulters Barbara Wilson writes: "The responsibility for their apprehension was assigned to the Dominion Police, who on May 31 were placed under the control of the Department of Militia and Defence and became the Civil Branch of the Canadian Military Police Corps." Barbara WILSON, *Ontario and the First World War, 1914-1918*, Toronto: The Champlain Society for the Government of Ontario, University of Toronto Press, 1977, p. lxxv.

The initial response of the people of Québec to the war effort had been favourable. Within months, however, as the domination of the army and the war effort by the English-speaking emerged clearly, this attitude began to change. As French-speaking enlistments fell behind those of other groups in the country, they were subject to more frequent criticism. The fact that these French-speaking people were almost exclusively Catholic enabled some Canadians to equate the two, and to extend a displeasure with the French to all Catholics. Sir Wilfrid Laurier appreciated this dilemma. Under the pressure of war he frequently wondered whether he, or any 'French-Canadian Roman Catholic,' should ever have accepted national leadership. As early as January 1917, he feared that the coming election would be heavily fueled by insidious prejudice.⁷ The growth of a spirit of anti-Catholic sentiment in Canada was associated in part with criticism of the neutral stand taken by the Pope on the war. At times this critical spirit reached excessive lengths and led to charges that the Catholic Church was prolonging the war and aiding the enemy.⁸

A Canadian historian has recently written that the Union Government campaign of 1917 was "...one of the few in Canadian history deliberately conducted on racist grounds."⁹ At least some prominent supporters of the government promoted their cause through attacks on Catholicism. One article on the Guelph affair was later prefaced with the following allegations:

Elaborate plans had been laid by the Unionist party to make the Canadian General Election of 1917 a campaign of anti-Catholic bigotry and bitterness. Tons of literature were ready; the lodges were notified,

⁷ Oscar SKELTON, *Life and Letters of Sir Wilfrid Laurier, vol. II, 1896-1919*, Toronto, McClelland and Stewart, 1971, p. 177.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 183. Media attention helped to nourish this spirit considerably. Charles Murphy, M.P., later claimed that Canadian newspapers picked up anti-Laurier, anti-Catholic articles from Boston's *Christian Science Monitor*, during the autumn of 1917, and spread them wide across the country. The December issue of *The Canadian Home Journal* claimed that "Germany's reptile democracy uses many agencies in many lands, and the most important agency that it is today using on Canadian soil is the Roman Catholic Church." For its part, the Orange *Sentinel* interpreted the successful Union election as "A crushing defeat for the Roman Catholic Hierarchy of Québec and their allies in the other provinces ..." (December 20, 1917). Charles MURPHY, *Debates*, House of Commons, March 19, 1918, p. 38.

⁹ J.L. GRANATSTEIN and J.M. HITSMAN, *Broken Promises: A History of Conscription in Canada*, Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1977.

the newspapers were prepared. The keynote of the campaign was struck in the unfair and untruthful speech of the Hon. Newton Wesley Rowell at North Bay in December, 1917.¹⁰

The December 7 issue of the *Globe*, which carried Rowell's speech, likewise presented a defensive letter from London's Bishop Fallon. The North Bay speech had commented at length on the Québec situation and concluded that some of Québec's Catholic clergy were involved in a reactionary, nationalist attempt to dominate not only Québec but all of Canada.¹¹ The Bishop's letter was an appeal to all Catholics to keep racial and religious questions strictly separate. He wished to avoid the appearance that Catholics were combining to form a united voting block. His letter concluded:

I make the definite and unequivocal appeal to my fellow countrymen of the Catholic faith to support the Union Government and the cause for which that Union was effected. And I make this appeal fully conscious of the vile and indefensible anti-Catholic propaganda that certain supporters of the Union Government are conducting in its name; for I am confident, if Catholics do not play into their hands, that the bigots will, in the long run, injure no one but themselves.¹²

The Bishop's letter pleased some, at least in the Union Government, as well as the editor of the *Globe*, while angering

¹⁰ "The Raid on the Guelph Novitiate," in: *A Double Collapse of Bigotry*, London, Ont.: The Catholic Unity League of Canada, 1919, p. 9, National Library, Pamphlet Collection.

¹¹ Newton W. ROWELL, *Globe*, December 7, 1919. Rowell's speech, and the part he played in the 1917 election campaign, elicited a stinging attack in the House from a Laurier loyalist, Charles Murphy, in the opening days of the session, March, 1919. Margaret Prang comments that "Murphy professed to discern in the whole conscription movement and the Unionist campaign an anti-Catholic, anti-French, anti-Laurier plot to deceive the Canadian people, the 'crowning infamy' being the use of Protestant pulpits as 'political cockpits' and the attempt to convince the new women voters that the most important agency of German diplomacy was the Roman Catholic Church." Margaret PRANG, *Newton Wesley Rowell – Ontario Nationalist*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1975, p. 240. Prang does not comment on Rowell's contribution to the religious overtones of the campaign, but sympathizes with his decision to avoid responding to Murphy's vitriolic attack, for fear that it would just open old wounds. When he does respond, one year later, his defence is less than convincing. PRANG, p. 323.

¹² Bishop Patrick FALLON, the *Globe*, December 7, 1917.

many Catholic Liberal supporters and failing to dispel completely fears of a Catholic coalition.¹³

The overwhelming Union success in the December elections left the Liberals with a heavy concentration of seats only in Québec. The virtual identification of the Liberal party with Québec provided zealots with some basis for linking Catholics with opposition to the Union Government and, by extension, to the war itself.

c. Guelph - The Local Setting

The Union campaign found strong support in Guelph. The Citizen's Union Committee had urged for the government candidates in the December elections. Their full page advertisement in the December 11 *Globe* proclaimed that the Committee, "...anxious for the maintenance of British ideals and traditions, views with alarm the menace of French Canadian domination with its inevitable influence upon the home, the school, and the state."¹⁴ The Guelph Ministerial Association had already taken a prominent place in promoting the war effort through fund raising and by encouraging enlistments. They also offered public support for the Union Government, showing a collective as well as an individual response to the electoral campaign and the war effort.

The pressure to increase enlistments in early 1918 encouraged a growing restiveness on the part of some Guelph residents. In early February the Ministerial Association wrote to London headquarters complaining against the fact that permission to re-open the Guelph Novitiate question had been denied Mr. Westoby. They observed that Protestant colleges had made great sacrifices, and they were very disturbed by the failure of military authorities to induct the novices. The letter noted their intention to make action.¹⁵ On April 19 Westoby wrote to Hindson warning that,

Locally the feeling is very bitter against these people, or rather against their practice of harbouring young men of

¹³ *Globe*, editorial, December 8, 1917.

¹⁴ *Globe*, December 11, 1917.

¹⁵ W.D. Spence, President, Guelph Ministerial Association, to Lt. Col. Smith, A./D.O.C., Military District No. 1, London. *Record* – for submission to the Royal Commission appointed to enquire into the action taken with regard to the St. Stanislaus' Novitiate, at Guelph, Ontario. Containing all papers from the Ministerial and Departmental Files on the subject. Prepared August 28, 1919, P.A.C. RG 14, D2, Vol. 58, file 101, 1919, p. 51.

military age, and unless something is soon done there is going to be an explosion, as the Ministerial body have determined to see the thing through ...¹⁶

Rumours had already gone around the country insinuating that Catholic lads were flocking to novitiates and seminaries to avoid military service. The entrance of Marcus Doherty, son of the Canadian Minister of Justice, into the Guelph novitiate in early 1918 was well noted in the press. Exaggerated rumours grew concerning the numbers in these institutions and the occupations of the men found there. Around Guelph, one "...resident claimed that he had seen cannons and munitions being brought into the Novitiate, while others claimed that Jesuits had constructed a network of tunnels into the City proper."¹⁷

3. THE RAID

The events of late May and early June 1918 reveal an increasing official interest in the Guelph novitiate. One account for this interest suggests that the added attention arose through the vengeful intercession of a Catholic undertaker in Hamilton. Fearing that his two seminarian nephews would not be protected from military service, this man determined that Mr. Doherty's son would never reach the priesthood, and so he wrote to the Justice Department claiming that Marcus and others at the novitiate were evaders.¹⁸ Other evidence, however, reveals the significance of increasing pressure from Guelph. During May Captain Leslie Burrows, from the Provost Marshall's office in Ottawa, spent some time in Guelph, and later spoke with Hugh Guthrie. Burrows wondered about three men rumoured to be hiding out at the novitiate. In fact, of the three, only George Nunan was present there. Guthrie then spoke with General S.C. Mewburn, Minister of Militia and Defence, giving him the names of these men and inquiring as to their status. On May 30 Col. Godson-Godson, Provost Marshall for Canada, wired Major J. Hirsch, A.P.M.,

¹⁶ H. Westoby to Captain W. Hindson, April 8, 1919, Record, p. 2.

¹⁷ Leo A. JOHNSON, *History of Guelph, 1827-1927*, Guelph, Ont.: Guelph Historical Society, 1977, p. 34.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 118-127.

London, asking why "...students at St. Jerome's College, Kitchener, and the Novitiate at Guelph have not been called."¹⁹

The central document in the case originated from the Provost Marshall's office in Ottawa on June 5. An impatient memo from General Mewburn, rather than initiating a careful letter of instructions, was hastily forwarded to London, giving the impression that the novitiate was to be "cleaned out" immediately.²⁰ This terse memorandum inspired the local Assistant Provost Marshall to command Captain Macaulay to organize a body of men and to proceed to Guelph in search of evaders. The note cautioned him to proceed with tact and discretion, but warned him to be on guard against possible escape attempts.²¹ The original inquiry about the three young men was thus escalated into a full scale raid on the novitiate.

The actual investigation began as the novices were retiring at 9:30 P.M. Captain Macaulay and Inspector Menard, in civilian clothes, were admitted to the building and Fr. Bourque was summoned. Captain Macaulay acted in a brusque and surly manner from the beginning. After a brief discussion the rector excused himself and called on Fr. Wm. Hingston S.J., former rector of the novitiate and now Captain Hingston, just returned from overseas as a chaplain to the Canadian forces in France. Fr. Bourque requested that he deal with these men, trusting in his greater familiarity with military matters, and himself began telephoning for information and legal advice. The appearance of Fr. Hingston, in full military dress, startled Macaulay and Menard. A conversation commenced which grew somewhat heated by the time Fr. Bourque returned. The discussion centered on the rector's earlier request that the two gentlemen in mufti properly identify themselves and produce written authority justifying their demand to search the premises. In reply Macaulay read from a document showing that an officer must have authorization, and then refused to show any. As the argument

¹⁹ Col. Godson-Godson to Major Hirsch, May 30, 1918, Record, *op. cit.*, p. 163.

²⁰ Col. GODSON-GODSON, *Evidence, op. cit.*, p. 551. Burrows, the man who forwarded the memo, having been transferred to Vancouver some time after this incident, did not appear as a witness, and his superior officer attempted an explanation of his role.

²¹ Major Hirsch to Macaulay, in: MIDDLETON and CHISOLM, *Report*, pp. 7-8. Macaulay later testified that the order to investigate the novitiate was the only one which had ever come to him from Hirsch in writing.

continued, Fr. Bourque received a call from Judge Hayes advising him to cooperate with the investigation in spite of the irregularities. Bourque then requested two visitors at the novitiate to witness Fr. Hingston's formal protest against the illegal proceedings.²² Following this he summoned the community to the refectory.

Macaulay later testified that the interrogations quickly convinced him that all of the approximately three dozen young Jesuits were defaulters, on the basis of the fact they did not produce the certificates required by the new Order-in-Council of June 1st. However, he said, as the hour was late, and as he lacked adequate transportation, he was content with arresting three of the men whose names were familiar to him, with the intention of returning for the remainder of the community in the morning.²³ The men he chose were Nunan, Doherty and Schmidt. This testimony was challenged by the Jesuits, including Joseph Bergin, who stated that he had not been asked to produce a certificate, nor were several other men whose testimony he happened to hear.²⁴ Bergin further testified that as early as November 1917 such certificates had been provided for everyone by Fr. Bourque.

When the interrogations had been completed and the prisoners prepared for departure, Marcus Doherty received permission to telephone his father in Ottawa. Following a conversation with his son, a somewhat upset Justice Minister summoned Macaulay to the telephone and inquired as to the conduct of the proceedings. On the basis of a brief discussion Doherty was convinced that Macaulay did not understand the implications of the exception clause. Accordingly, he advised the officer that his actions were illegal,²⁵ and requested him to remain at the novitiate pending instructions from a superior officer.

The hour was well after midnight when Doherty reached the Adjutant General, Ashton, and expressed his opinion that Macaulay was acting illegally and should withdraw from the novitiate. Major General Ashton immediately contacted Hirsch in London and Macaulay at the novitiate, ordering suspension of activity and of the arrests. The captain was commanded to retire for the night, to

²² *Evidence*, p. 727.

²³ Macaulay's testimony, *Evidence*, p. 409.

²⁴ Testimony of J. Bergin, S.J., *Evidence*, p. 652.

²⁵ Charles DOHERTY, *Evidence*, p. 454.

return and complete his inquiries in the morning and then to submit a full report of his activities.

4. REACTIONS

The reactions to the evening's investigation developed in three stages. The first stage began on the morning of June 8 when Captain Macaulay returned to the novitiate to obtain a complete list of information. For his part, Father Bourque spent a good portion of the day drafting a letter to General Mewburn, protesting against the manner in which the investigation had been made, during the night, by a large force in muffi, and advising that,

I will not accept the base imputation that this Religious Community is in league with deserters to evade the law, nor can I tolerate in the least degree that such an odious impression be made on the public mind as undoubtedly must be made such a preposterous display of force.²⁶

From Ottawa Colonel Godson-Godson, Provost Marshall, wired Hirsch in London demanding a full report and stating that "... the whole thing shows great lack of tact and judgement."²⁷ When General Mewburn returned on June 11 he immediately replied to Fr. Bourque's letter, apologizing for the manner in which the authorities had acted and promising a full investigation. The following day Ashton ordered the Provost Marshall himself to visit London and Guelph, to "... conduct the necessary inquiry and deal immediately with the officers responsible for this regrettable occurrence."²⁸

In the meantime, Doherty and Mewburn had conferred and both agreed that news items relating to the incident should be banned awaiting a full report from the Department of Militia and Defence. The decision was based on the fact that within a day or two of the raid exaggerated stories were circulating in the Guelph area. The Justice Minister feared that such stories, if published, could "... create trouble throughout the country and foment the racial feeling which was ... existing throughout certain sections of the country."²⁹ At the same time Doherty was responding to pressure from Father

²⁶ Rev. Bourque to General Mewburn, June 8, 1919, *Record*, p. 21.

²⁷ Godson-Godson to Hirsch, June 10, 1918, *Record*, p. 33.

²⁸ Ashton to Godson-Godson, June 12, 1918, *Record*, p. 40.

²⁹ E.J. Chambers' testimony, *Evidence*, p. 442.

Hingston who wished to publish news of the incident to protect the Jesuits against malicious slander. The censorship decision appeared to be a prudent one. However, it left the Jesuits feeling uneasy, and it absolutely infuriated the Guelph Ministerial Association, which interpreted it as an attempt to muzzle the truth and to protect the Jesuits and the Justice Minister.

Colonel Godson-Godson's conclusions were later upheld in the *Report* of the Royal Commission. His findings prompted criticism of Major Hirsch, in that his orders showed ". . . lack of good judgement," but they fell primarily on Captain Macaulay, specifying three glaring failures. These involved his refusal to produce the required written authority and his persistence in pursuing the investigation without the authority; his conduct of the raid in muffi; and, finally, the general lack of good judgement shown in his high-handed manner during the early part of the evening. The Colonel suggested that in view of the officer's unblemished record, a transfer to Winnipeg would serve as sufficient punitive action.³⁰ While coming down hard on his subordinate officers, the Provost Marshall also suggested that if Fr. Bourque had furnished the information requested earlier the incident may have been avoided, claiming that Fr. Power, the superior of all Canadian Jesuits, agreed with his assessment.³¹ The findings of the Royal Commission did not explicitly sustain this criticism of the rector. This judgement apart, however, the Provost Marshall's chief purpose in visiting the novitiate was to extend the apologies of the Department of Militia and Defence to the Jesuits.

In Ottawa a thorough review proceeded into the meaning of the law and the status of each of the Jesuits at St. Stanislaus. The judges eventually concluded that the Justice Minister's interpretation had been correct and that all of the Jesuits were legally excepted. Only J.P. O'Leary, a returned and honourably discharged soldier, who had been visiting the farm with the hope of being accepted into the Society of Jesus, was judged liable for service under recent legislation.

The stories in Guelph had meanwhile continued and grown in intensity. Ten days after the raid Fr. Bourque wrote to General Mewburn advising him that the number of slanderous attacks were becoming increasingly exaggerated. The priest protested that an

³⁰ Godson-Godson to Ashton, June 18, 1918, *Record*, pp. 63-64.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 62.

extended ban on news of the case would only put them in a worse light. On the same day the Guelph Ministerial Association wired Mewburn advising him that they now knew all the facts relating to the Guelph affair, and they were determined to have appropriate publicity.³²

The growing discontent finally proved to be too much for the requested ban on news. The first stage of reaction to the raid ended with the publication of the story in the Toronto *Star* of June 19. The *Star's* scoop angered publishers across the country. Having cooperated with the original request to suppress news of this potentially explosive event, they now found themselves outdone by an apparently less scrupulous competitor, and were justly displeased. In reply, E.J. Chambers, the Chief Censor, promised to seek increased powers. During the summer the hitherto voluntary system of censorship was strengthened by the introduction of stiff fines and prison terms of up to five years.³³

The *Star* exposure initiated a flood of front page stories across the country. While the newspapers fully exploited the opportunity for sensational headlines, many showed admirable restraint in their critical appraisal of the allegations. Guelph press accounts generally sympathized with the charges levelled against the novitiate community and the government. They provided considerable coverage for the assemblies and sermons of Rev. H.B. Christie, a Methodist pastor and chairman of the Ministerial Association, and Rev. Kennedy Palmer. The Guelph *Daily Herald* had already protested that if city boys were expected to fight, so too should farm boys and “. . . members of every religious community in the country.”³⁴ The Ottawa *Citizen* of June 24 reviewed the Sunday sermons of eight Guelph churches, noting that all but the Anglican pastor preached on the incident, some at great length and with considerable feeling. The Anglican minister who dared to remain silent was castigated by ‘Jack Canuck’ for failing to censure the Jesuits. Some weeks later the *Herald* bore the burden of Rev. Christie’s recent sermon exhorting the Orangemen to stand firm against the menace of the Roman Catholic Church. According to the minister, it

³² Guelph Ministerial Association to Mewburn, June 17, 1918, *Record*, p. 57.

³³ F.G. Aldham to Winnipeg editors, September 7, 1918, P.A.C. Press Censor Files.

³⁴ Guelph *Daily Herald*, June 15, 1918.

appeared as though that church "... had its hand at the throat of the new government."³⁵

The Ontario press provided full coverage for the event, noting that Marcus Doherty had been judged medically unfit for service,³⁶ and that his only brother had died in the war.³⁷ The *Telegram* claimed that the police had "... as much right to search a Jesuit novitiate, as a pool room or Knox College," and believed that the whole fuss was caused by undue ministerial influence from Ottawa, particularly on the part of Guthrie and Mewburn.³⁸ The *Star* pointed out that exception for members of religious communities were provided in the United States, Britain and other parts of the Empire.³⁹ Ontario's French-speaking press took the opportunity to point out the error of their ways to Irish Catholics who had joined with the Orange Association in the on-going language quarrels, and suggested a coalition to protect more basic and sacred rights against Orange hypocrisy.⁴⁰

Newspaper coverage in Québec was extensive and critical both of the raid and the exploitation of the event. This was true not only of French and Catholic newspapers, but especially of the English and Protestant press, priding its own province on the degree of tolerance enjoyed there in matters religious. *Le Devoir* stressed the importance of observing that the rector of the novitiate was a French-speaking Canadian, and suggested that this event had all the appearance of a general campaign.⁴¹ *Le Soleil* referred to the great indignation shown by both Protestants and Catholics at this affront to a religious institution,⁴² and *L'Action Catholique* highlighted this same theme.⁴³ Québec City's *Chronicle* editorialized the event in

³⁵ *Daily Herald*, August 26, 1918.

³⁶ *Ottawa Evening Journal*, June 21, 1918. The final medical report, written to the Justice Minister by his son's personal physician, warned Mr. Doherty that quite apart from his past history of diphtheria and scarlet fever, or his present high blood pressure and generally poor physique, there was question of a possibly serious kidney ailment.

³⁷ *Le Devoir*, le 27 juin 1918.

³⁸ *The Evening Telegram*, June 25, 1918.

³⁹ *Toronto Star*, June 26, 1918.

⁴⁰ *Le Journal de Waterloo*, le 27 juin 1918.

⁴¹ *Le Devoir*, le 25 juin 1918.

⁴² *Le Soleil*, le 22 juin 1918.

⁴³ *L'Action Catholique*, le 27 juin 1918.

extremely critical language, offering a rare turn of the screw to Ontarians:

At the bottom of the petty persecution of this Jesuit College in Ontario there can be discerned the main motives which have been hurled as a reproach against Québec by the sister Province: religious fanaticism and clerical interference in matters of State.⁴⁴

The most spectacular single incident during this second stage of reaction to the raid occurred in Montreal when Lt. Col. H.A. Machin, Director of the Military Service Branch of the Ministry of Justice in Ottawa, and member of the Ontario Legislature for Kenora, issued a blistering denunciation of the Guelph raid. The Colonel defended the manner in which the Justice people had supervised the Military Service Act and charged the Department of Militia with trying to expand its administrative territory.⁴⁵ Warning to his task the officer testified to the character and accomplishments of his superior, and lashed out at his detractors claiming that

There is evidence that a powerful cabal exists at Ottawa against the Minister of Justice (Hon. C.J. Doherty), which showed its head last week in the disgraceful and brutal raid on the Jesuit College at Guelph.⁴⁶

As an Anglican, said the Colonel, he protested against this spiteful treatment of the Jesuits. He saw the implications of the action as being extremely serious, and charged those responsible for indulging in such personal vanities as being “. . . worse than traitors - they are worse than the Huns.” The interview concluded with the stinging accusation that “. . . the greatest menace in the Province of Ontario at the present time is the Methodist Church which seeks to make us the most hypocritical province in Canada.”⁴⁷ This interview revealed the widening chasm between Justice and Militia and Defence over the supervision of the M.S.A. It also added fresh fuel to the discontent growing over the raid. The newspapers speculated that Machin would be fired and wondered about the existence of such a cabal. Press reports referred to Doherty's embarrassment at this unexpected outburst on the part of his

⁴⁴ The Quebec *Chronicle*, June 24, 1918.

⁴⁵ Lt. Col. MACHIN, The Montreal *Gazette*, June 25, 1918.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

subordinate, particularly the charges against the Methodist Church. The Colonel soon retracted the charges he had levelled at the Methodist Church, and he retained his post. Many months later Doherty wrote to Borden saying that the statement at least served to show Catholics that “. . . the feeling behind the raid was not the general feeling of Protestants.”⁴⁸ He explained that his decision to retain Machin was inspired by a desire to avoid fanning further religious strife as the firing would certainly have antagonized Catholics.

Shortly after the raid Macaulay was sent off to Winnipeg. Within the month Fr. Bourque was also transferred to Winnipeg, as rector of St. Paul's College in the University of Manitoba. Sometime later Captain Burrows, the Ottawa official who had hastily forwarded the ambitious memo to London, was moved to Vancouver. This westward migration elicited some comment at the Commission hearings, Justice Middleton wryly observing that Winnipeg “. . . must be a favourite place.”⁴⁹ While Rev. Palmer's lawyer tried to interpret Fr. Bourque's transfer as a disciplinary measure, other testimony showed that it was a routine move directed by his familiarity with the administrative structure of the University. A more direct and immediate result of the raid was the fact that the new National Registration of June 22 required everyone over the age of sixteen years to register, “. . . except for cloistered nuns, persons on active service and inmates of asylums, penitentiaries and prisons.”⁵⁰

During July and August press coverage was only sufficient to keep the memories warm. On the Catholic side the *Register* gloomily concluded that members of that church would never be free from sectarian attacks, and in July the editor wrote that it was all connected with the annual observance of the Battle of the Boyne. The opposing side, however, neither liked nor allowed this stilling of the waters, and during the following weeks the Rev. Kennedy Palmer, a Presbyterian minister, assumed the leadership of the continuing complaints against the government and the Jesuits. By July he was preaching in Toronto churches against the conspiracy of silence surrounding the St. Stanislaus raid, and

⁴⁸ Doherty to Borden, *Borden Papers, P.A.C.*, February 12, 1918, C4416, p. 136121.

⁴⁹ Justice MIDDLETON, *Evidence*, p. 712.

⁵⁰ Barbara WILSON, p. 1xv.

demanding a parliamentary investigation.⁵¹ His preaching efforts and the earlier furor, combined with the advocacy of *Sentinel* publisher and M.P., H.C. Hocken, stimulated a national writing campaign by the Orange Lodge to new papers, the Prime Minister and other federal officials. A review of the *Borden Papers* indicates that on some days during the succeeding months there were more letters dealing with the Guelph affair than with all other business combined.⁵²

The third stage of reaction to the raid opened with a tour of Western Canada by Rev. Palmer beginning at an Orange convention in Winnipeg in early September. The minister had already written to Mr. Borden explaining that he would be speaking "... by invitation, in every city from Winnipeg to the Pacific Coast."⁵³ He indicated that he had consistently maintained Borden's absolute innocence in the affair and would continue to do so.

Even before his arrival in the West, a bumbling bureaucracy caused a stir. Aldham, the local Press Censor, acting on his own initiative, sent a strong reminder to the Winnipeg press regarding the forthcoming visit, and virtually threatening fines or prison terms to anyone publicizing the minister's accusations.⁵⁴ This heavy-handed approach enabled Rev. Palmer and his supporters to claim that the government was trying to muzzle the truth. It led to a flurry of letters between the Chief Censor, Aldham and Rev. Palmer. From Winnipeg an infuriated J.W. Dafe wired Chambers that "The political consequences of your action are incalculable and I advise you to consult with Sir Robert Borden without delay."⁵⁵ While Aldham apologized to Chambers for the trouble he had stirred, he insisted that "There is not the slightest doubt that the stuff he is preaching here renders him liable to imprisonment ..."⁵⁶

⁵¹ The *Ottawa Citizen*, July 7, 1918.

⁵² The *Borden Papers*, Index, P.A.C. For example, the Index lists 102 total references for July 22, 1918, of which 62 refer to the 'Roman Catholic Church, the Orange Order or Conscriptio[n],' and almost all of these stemmed directly from the Guelph incident. During the summer months it appears that roughly one-half to one-third of the correspondence directed to the Prime Minister and listed in the Index was concerned with this matter.

⁵³ Palmer to Borden, *Borden Papers*, August 31, 1918. C433 1, p.53182.

⁵⁴ F.G. Aldham to Winnipeg editors, *op. cit.*

⁵⁵ J.W. Dafe to E. Chambers, telegram (date?), P.A.C. Press Censor Files.

⁵⁶ Aldham to Chambers, letter, September 13, 1918. P.A.C. Press Censor Files.

The tour stretched across the West and in Saskatoon, Calgary, Edmonton and other cities, hundreds and even thousands of people turned out to hear the minister's charges. The general strategy was to have a large public rally and then for Rev. Palmer to meet with the Ministerial Association in each locale, and perhaps to speak in particular churches. The Ministerial Associations, as in Saskatoon and Calgary,⁵⁷ joined their demands to those of other individuals and the Orange Lodges for a parliamentary inquiry.

When he had returned to Guelph Palmer wrote to Borden assuring him that his name had been protected throughout the tour, pointing out the unanimous support of western Ministerial Associations and requesting both a personal meeting with the Prime Minister and a larger meeting between Borden and members of Parliament, the Orange Lodge and Ministerial Associations. Borden granted the first request but the second was deferred until December when Acting Prime Minister White met with Rev. Palmer's delegation. The private meeting led to Borden's conclusion that "It will be necessary to consider the situation in Council."⁵⁸ Two days later the Prime Minister ". . . sent for White, Doherty and Mewburn as to Guelph Novitiate and told them it was serious . . ."⁵⁹ Apparently, even with the war coming to an end, Borden thought enough of the question to believe it could make for some social disturbance, or at least an embarrassment for the government. The December 12 meeting with White led to the suggestion that formal charges should be made while parliament was in session.

The whole affair had so impressed Borden that it made for a continuing dialogue with Doherty at the Peace Talks in Paris.⁶⁰ In February Doherty drafted a memorandum explaining his failure to fire Colonel Machin, and later expressed some of the difficulty the incident had caused him, hinting that the Catholic response had been far stronger than was publicly evident:

⁵⁷ *Borden Papers*, pp. 53227-53230. At the same time, it is interesting to note that: "The Methodist General Conference in Hamilton on October 12th, 1918, refused to be drawn in the controversy and merely tabled the Guelph resolution on the matter." H.P. PHELAN, *50 Years at Guelph: The Story of Ignatius College* (Toronto: Jesuit Archives, manuscript), p. 38.

⁵⁸ *Borden Papers*, November 5, 1918, p. 53265.

⁵⁹ Henry BORDEN, ed., *Robert Laird Borden: His Memoirs, vol. II* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, Ltd.), 1969, p. 155.

⁶⁰ Borden to Doherty, January 16, 1919, *Borden Papers*, p. 136117.

The strength of the feeling aroused by the Guelph incident has, I think, never been fully appreciated by many of my colleagues. It strained to the utmost such influence as I had to prevent finding its vent in expressions and actions that would have added fuel to the flames of religious animosity that already burn too brightly in our country.⁶¹

The Justice Minister had an excellent appreciation of the existence of religious intolerance in the country, and little patience with it. In March, when he proposed a visit to Rome to confer with Vatican officials on peace proposals, Borden vetoed the trip on the grounds that such a visit might well upset public feeling in Canada. Doherty replied with a long confidential letter explaining that the Church was a powerful force for peace and lamenting the fact that Borden was encouraging bigotry by bending before the zealots. He protested that his own political life had been devoted to cautioning moderation in religious matters, even at the expense of popularity among fellow Catholics. That, however, was the price to be paid for containing "... this curse ... that is actually disintegrating our young nation."⁶² His concluding remarks show that the events of the last year had left their mark on the politician:

There is even among the wisest, the most loyal and the most conservative of Catholics a strong and steadily growing feeling that all Governments and all parties are so completely mastered by the dread of the Orange influence that forty per cent of Canada's people can hope only to live on sufferance in their own country, and even that on condition that they attract as little attention as possible to the fact that they and their beliefs exist.⁶³

5. THE ROYAL COMMISSION ENQUIRY

While the peace discussions proceeded in Europe, Parliament reassembled in Canada. On April 7, Sam Hughes⁶⁴ introduced a motion requesting a House Select Committee to investigate the charges brought by the Rev. Palmer against Doherty and the Department of Justice. They were accused of improper conduct and interference in the application of the M.S.A. to the Jesuit

⁶¹ Doherty to Borden, February 1919, *Borden Papers*, C4416, p. 13612.

⁶² *Ibid.*

⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴ Sir Sam Hughes and Rev. Palmer were well acquainted. For a time the minister served as Sir Sam's personal secretary, and he later attended the Colonel on his deathbed. (Interview with Rev. W.K. Palmer, December 21, 1977.)

Novitiate, and of having compounded that impropriety by the attempt to impose censorship on news of the affairs.⁶⁵ Sir Sam elaborated on these charges himself, and was particularly incensed by the actions of the Department of Militia and Defence and the treatment received by Captain Macaulay. The motion touched off a five-hour debate⁶⁶ which witnessed many angry moments and concluded by recommending a Royal Commission Enquiry.

The actual Enquiry was delayed until the return of Mr. Doherty from Paris in late summer. The unfortunate notoriety of the case, and the fact that any solution was bound to displease a sizeable body of opinion, led to fresh difficulties for the Prime Minister as he attempted to name commissioners. Justice Davies declined on the grounds that the “. . . enquiry would almost certainly develop into a politics religious (*sic*) controversy which I felt it was undesirable the Chief Justice of Canada should be mixed up with.”⁶⁷ Borden finally secured the services of Justice Middleton of the Supreme

⁶⁵ Rev. Palmer’s charges, advanced by Sam HUGHES, *Debates*, April 7, 1919, p. 1221.

⁶⁶ During the debate Liberal members, primed with facts and figures, reflected on the Catholic and Jesuit contribution to the war effort. M.J.E.O. Gladu (Yamaska), had put considerable preparation into his remarks. As well as being able to quote enlistment figures from the various Canadian colleges conducted by the Jesuits, he was able to point out that over 700 members of the Society of Jesus had enlisted world-wide, and 160 of these had given their lives. The remainder had collected an astonishing number of awards and decorations for their services. *Debates*, April 7, 1919, p. 1240f. Issues of the *Register* regularly carried news of priest-chaplains wounded or killed in action. In defence of the Catholic effort, a June issue quoted the President of Aberdeen University who noted the presence of 60,000 Catholic priests serving with the French Army, 20,000 in the Red Cross and 40,000 in the trenches. The paper noted that many of these men had been exiled by the Associations Law, but they returned to the aid of their country with the war. *Register*, June 27, 1918.

Within the Canadian forces there had apparently been some initial difficulties in having the army accept the desired number of Catholic chaplains and the higher ranks were not open to the priests. (Major the Very Rev. J.R. O’GORMAN, J.C.D., “Canadian Catholic Chaplains in the Great War, 1914-1918,” Canadian Catholic Historical Association, *Study Sessions*, 7 (1939), p. 74.) Some of these difficulties were later overcome. By war’s end there were 290 chaplains authorized to serve, of whom 102 were Anglican and 58 Roman Catholic. The *Report of the Ministry on Canadian Chaplain Services* praised the heroism of these men, and commended them for the example and inspiration they provided for the troops.

⁶⁷ Chief Justice Davies to Borden, *Borden Papers*, C4331, p. 53281 ; Justice Anglin, p. 53284.

Court of Ontario and Justice Chisolm of the Supreme Court of Nova Scotia.

The debate over Sir Sam Hughes' motion, and the summoning of the Royal Commission attracted front page interest. The Enquiry itself, with many contentious moments and a few dramatic ones as well, drew national attention and some headlines during its five day duration. Captain Macaulay had apparently been afflicted by tuberculosis in the meantime, and he proved to be a weak witness for Sam Hughes and Rev. Palmer. His collapse, following his testimony, attracted considerable attention in the newspapers. The same afternoon witnessed some similarly dramatic moments when Mr. Doherty was reported as having ". . . broke down several times," during his statement, particularly when he touched on the medical condition of his son. Unexpectedly Sam Hughes came to Doherty's defence, and almost broke down himself as he spoke of the Justice Minister: "I knew the Judge as an old soldier. He went to the North West with myself in 1885, and I know if he had forty boys he would put his sons in the Service if they were fit."⁶⁸ In the course of the day both Hughes and counsel for Rev. Palmer agreed to an absolute withdrawal of any charges or insinuations that Marcus Doherty had any intent to avoid the draft or that his father had collaborated in any way to shield his son.

During the subsequent days of testimony Rev. Palmer's solicitor, Mr. Ferguson, found himself frustrated time and again as he strained and failed to find some ground on which to justify the charges. In a final desperate twist Ferguson questioned the legality of the Society of Jesus as a religious community in Ontario. Reaching back to the English Reformation and ranging through clerical suppression laws as recent as the eighteenth century, the lawyer strove to show that since the Jesuits had been legally incorporated only in the province of Québec, they could not legally 'make' novices, or members of their community in Ontario.⁶⁹

In his concluding remarks Justice Middleton anticipated the findings of the Royal Commission *Report* when he commented that Justice Chisolm and himself were impressed by the efforts made by Doherty and Mewburn to avoid fanning sectarian strife,⁷⁰ particularly approving of the attempted efforts at censorship.⁷¹

⁶⁸ *Sir Sam HUGHES, Evidence*, p. 461.

⁶⁹ *FERGUSON, Evidence*, p. 878.

⁷⁰ *MIDDLETON, Evidence*, p. 925 f

⁷¹ *MIDDLETON, Evidence*, pp. 927-928.

The Commissioners commended the good intent of the Adjutant General, Ashton, and the Provost Marshall. Criticism was reserved primarily for Major Hirsch and for Captain Macaulay who had acted in such an arbitrary and tactless manner.⁷²

The *Report*, released in early November, sustained the foregoing conclusions by the two commissioners. It stated that the Jesuit novices had all been legally excepted from service, and commented that one year after the war had ended, only one of those novices had left the Society of Jesus, and he had departed due to ill health.⁷³ In reply to the charges that special favours had been extended to the institution the Report replied that this was the only institution in the country “. . . against which a raid had been directed.”⁷⁴ In fact, a systematic consideration of the charges made by Rev. Palmer and Col. Hughes revealed that none of the charges could be substantiated.

The press gave considerable and generally favourable to the Commission findings. However, the *Evening Telegram* was most critical of the Report, devoting a whole page to the theme of “‘Jesuit Night at Ottawa’ – Attempt to Dodge the ‘Curse of Rome.’”⁷⁵ The *Register* of September 25 had quietly commended the hearings and restricted its rejoicing to a short, bitter comment on the bigotry and prejudice endured by the minority community. *Saturday Night* expressed great satisfaction at the check given to sectarian intolerance by Justice Middleton.⁷⁶ Another editor, with an eye to the political consequences of the affair and the recent Ontario election, wrote that

The Novitiate Raid was a poor advertisement for Protestantism, and the main body of Protestants felt ashamed of it. They have no use for the noisy agitator who framed it, and for the weakness of a government that pandered to such bigotry they have nothing but contempt. The Protestants of Ontario have shown this in one election and the Protestants of the Dominion will show it to another government when the fateful hour of election arrives.⁷⁷

⁷² *Ibid.*

⁷³ *Report*, Barbara WILSON, p. 67.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 66.

⁷⁵ The *Evening Telegram*, Wed. November 5, 1919. Another lengthy and declamatory article appeared on November 13, 1919.

⁷⁶ *Saturday Night*, November 15, 1919.

⁷⁷ “The Last Word on the Raid,” Unidentified newspaper, November ?, 1919, Jesuit Archives.

Several references were made to Reverend Palmer's intended tour of the province to denounce the findings, but within a couple of weeks both he and the incident faded from media attention, if not from memory.

6. CONCLUSIONS

The raid and its aftermath are interesting for the light they cast on contemporary society and the interrelationship of religious, social and political affairs. One interpretation of the incident could validly stress the role of bureaucratic bungling, showing how the difficulties involved in introducing and administering the Military Service Act were compounded by a rather appalling state of communications and considerable inefficiency throughout the ranks. Too, the existence of cabinet disagreements and the evidence of squabbling in the upper echelons of the two departments, suggested by Colonel Machin, leaves one wondering whether, for once, Sam Hughes wasn't correct in his belief that Macaulay was being treated as the scapegoat of the affair.

It is also true, however, that the bureaucracy was caught short primarily when it was attempting to respond to the initiatives of others. Accordingly, its shortcomings tended to be exploited by those seeking to advance their own ends. Under the resulting pressures what was a mere incident became connected with a whole history of sectarian divisiveness and religious animosity. In Guelph, local gossip, newspapers, the Ministerial Association and particularly the Reverends Christie and Palmer elevated the local incident into a national issue. The negative racial and religious atmosphere of the time contributed to this accomplishment.

As for the conspiracy theories, there was no solid evidence of grand plots or cabals against Doherty or Catholics in general. However, the affair fits into a sporadic pattern of annoyance and antipathy which easily supported Catholic fears of conspiracies. It seems quite realistic to attribute Judge Doherty's intervention as central to the muted Catholic response. Conspiracy theories aside, the raid and its aftermath showed that the Orange Lodge could still summon a considerable interest. While the threatened religious cleavage did not develop to the extent at first feared, the appeal to a sectarian spirit elicited considerable response. The raid thus showed that the right incident, properly managed, could be used to surface latent anti-Catholic sentiments. The bitter religious divisions of the nineteenth century remained in memory and could still be stirred to life.

And yet, prejudice did not hold sway completely. In response to criticism Guelph's Anglican pastor pointed to his duty to preach the bible, not prejudice. The Methodist General Conference eschewed involvement in such a tainted business, and the impatient response of Québec's Anglo-Protestant press showed that a good many reflective Canadians wanted no part of such intolerant and exploitative doings. Too, the majority of newspapers, while taking advantage of the sales opportunity provided by sensational headlines, showed a critical attitude in their consideration of the charges. Most were ready to commend the findings of the Enquiry and to let the issue pass from public notice.

While the incident was no doubt disruptive of national unity, and distracted considerable energies from the central task of the time, it did not develop the cleavage at first threatened. Although the military successes beginning in the summer of 1918, and the end of the war itself, may be in part responsible for this, it is probably accurate to conclude that there existed a greater degree of tolerance within the country than was initially evident. And, with time, wounds healed. The Society of Jesus maintained its novitiate at Guelph. Rev. Kennedy Palmer was remembered in later life as being quite friendly towards Roman Catholics.⁷⁸ For his part, Father Bourque went on to a distinguished career, working closely with the heads of the various denominational colleges at the University of Manitoba. Both of these men lived to see the development of a broader spirit in their country, and one of those detained, Fr. George Nunan, S.J., has now lived well into a generation witnessing an unprecedented and generous ecumenical spirit.

⁷⁸ Telephone interview with Rev. W.K. Palmer.