

“Pretend Catholics” and Stampeders: The Romani- zation of the Diocese of Arichat/Antigonish, 1851-1910

PETER LUDLOW
St. Mary's University

On a sunlit Sunday morning in June 1896, Father Alexander MacDonald, the erudite professor of Latin, English, and Philosophy at St. Francis Xavier University, stood at the wooden pulpit of Immaculate Conception parish in rural Heatherton, Antigonish County, Nova Scotia, to read an address composed by his superior, Bishop John Cameron of Antigonish.¹ There was apprehension in the professor's voice as he began to deliver the carefully scripted note. It was the duty, so the bishop's letter read, of every conscientious Catholic to vote for the Conservative party candidate in the impending federal election. No Catholic in the diocese (in good standing) had the right to dispute this edict, be they priest or layman.² As MacDonald finished that sentence, the sound of three loud stomps on the wooden floor echoed through the building. At that moment some thirty to forty men, principal members of the Heatherton congregation, walked out of the building in protest.

The “Heatherton Stampede,” now merely a footnote in the region's history, was more significant than its immediate context.³ It was representative of a myriad of disobedient acts orchestrated by Nova Scotian Roman Catholics against their spiritual superiors from 1851 to 1910. Yet, despite the philosophical complexities, historians have explained the episode within the context of the partisan battles of the period.⁴ Politics, writes Cameron's biographer, R.A. MacLean, “shook the even tenor of life in Heatherton, provided an exercise in ambulatory democracy and ensured a topic of conversation and gossip for lengthy lamp-lit hours.”⁵ In fact, he

asserts, the stampedeers were “as adamant and partisan as the bishop.” D. Hugh Gillis, who pioneered research into Bishop John Cameron’s political forays with two papers in the 1940s, rightly argued that Cameron’s clergy (certainly not all) were never too “distantly apart from the political fray,” and that often priests intervened due to “self-interest or purely secular partisanship.”⁶ As the esteemed historian P.B. Waite noted, the resentment of those Heatherton farmers in Antigonish was because the area was “intensely local and personal in its politics.”

Clearly partisanship played a major role in the “Heatherton Stampede,” yet, as this paper will argue, the episode represented much more than a parochial fight over representation in the Canadian parliament. The stampede, and indeed the assortment of painful acts of disobedience and defiance against Bishop Cameron in this period, were a backlash against fifty years of ultramontanism in eastern Nova Scotia. By the 1890s, the Scottish laity of Antigonish could no longer abide the subtle attack on their religious traditions, and the ceaseless denunciations of their prelate’s politics, ecclesiastical judgments, and clerical changes (along with the numerous petitions to Rome) illustrated this frustration. The stampede from a sacred space was ostensibly a rejection of ecclesiastical partisanship, but it was also a rebuff of fifty years of Roman-dominated mentality in Catholic eastern Nova Scotia.

The Roman Catholic parish of Heatherton was typical of the communities that comprised eastern Nova Scotia in the nineteenth century. Its population was made up primarily of rural descendants of the Highland Gaels – there were Irish, Mi’Kmaq and Acadians as well – that left Scotland for Nova Scotia after 1746.⁷ These émigrés found scant religious organization in their new homes, and, as was the case in Scotland, they were both spiritually and materially impoverished.⁸ Like the Catholics of the rugged northwest of Scotland, the Highland migrants in Nova Scotia settled in small, remote pastoral communities with pathetic sanctuaries and infrequent visits from roving clergy.

In Heatherton, like other parishes in the diocese of Arichat, the memory of the rigid sectarianism of Scotland, and the rather indigent state of the early church in Nova Scotia, created a religious docility within the community. As late as 1922, one Nova Scotia priest wrote in the Scottish Catholic Association’s publication *Mosgladh*: “symptoms of it still appear among them [Scottish Catholics], and even among their descendants in this country, whose lot is cast among the Protestants. There is a shirking from the mention of holy things before unbelievers.”⁹ Like the timid “Old

Catholics” of England, who displayed a natural reserve in “expressing their loyalty to the papacy or in their descriptions of continental devotions,” the Catholics in eastern Nova Scotia were not overt in the display of their faith.¹⁰ Accurate or not, there was a conviction among the descendants of the Highland émigrés that the survival of Catholicism in the Scottish Highlands had depended primarily upon Protestant largess and a resilient Scottish Catholic aristocracy. “If the strath itself still resounds to the measured troad of a numerous Catholic yeomanry,” wrote one émigré to his local newspaper in the 1850s, “it was all thanks to Lord Lovat, a leading papist aristocrat in the Highlands.”¹¹

Dan MacInnes has recently published an important article illustrating the uniqueness of the priests who migrated to Nova Scotia with their Highland flock. They were, as MacInnes argues, quite different from their Irish or French-speaking colleagues. Besides offering spiritual guidance, the “heather priests” had replaced the old clan chief as a unifier among the Highland peoples, while being “physically equipped for the hard work of the frontier.”¹² One man who personified the “heather priest” both in Scotland and Nova Scotia was Father William Fraser. A graduate of the Scots College, Valladolid, Spain, and rector of the fledgling seminary at Lismore in the Inner Hebrides, Fraser arrived in Nova Scotia during the summer of 1822 and found that his new pastorate reflected the patterns of the old.¹³

As both A. A. Johnston and Dan MacInnes illustrate, there was a “lack of decorum” in the Scottish pioneer church, with chalices made of tin and chapels full of dogs.¹⁴ Highland Catholic communities throughout the Maritime colonies lacked infrastructure and finances. In the small settlements that dotted the eastern portions of Nova Scotia and Cape Breton Island, Highlanders had to wait for an annual visit from a neighbouring missionary, preferably one that spoke Gaelic. One French priest, frustrated in his attempt to minister to Highland immigrants, wrote to his bishop, “I could not instruct them because very few indeed understand the English language; and, except in Broad Cove [Cape Breton], none would undertake to interpret my instructions.”¹⁵ Even Bishop Joseph-Octave Plessis found that many Scots “seemed to be bored by [his] French instructions.”¹⁶

The inability of Quebec missionaries to persuade the Scots in Nova Scotia to take religious instruction in a language other than Gaelic is significant. Language was central to religious life in the Scottish Highlands, and, as one historian illustrates, in the eighteenth century, “children

were taught in Gaelic (although English and Latin were also taught), Gaelic or Irish Catechisms were provided, and priests themselves could converse at ease with the Highland inhabitants.”¹⁷ In fact, as Lisa Curry argues, “the priests’ readiness to use Gaelic gave the language a dignity at a time when it was coming under a sustained and often vitriolic attack from the Kirk and from successive governments.”¹⁸ The language was, however, not of the church in the way that Latin, Italian, and even French was, and it was distinctly non-Roman. It was an old world language that soon became a “new world reality” in Nova Scotia – and Rome simply did not appreciate this fact.¹⁹

In many ways, Gaelic also served to unify some Catholic Scots with their Presbyterian countrymen who had also migrated to Nova Scotia. Soon after his arrival Father Fraser realized that his ability to preach in Gaelic drew not only Roman Catholic crowds but Presbyterians who had no access to a pastor of their own.²⁰ He is an excellent preacher and master of the Celtic language, wrote a priest to the Bishop of Quebec, “the people, who had not heard three lines of the gospel read, or explained to them in a language they could understand for above three years prior to his coming, flocked to hear him. Even the Highland Protestants attended, as attentively as our people.”²¹ It was, of course, common for priests to write liberally of Protestant conversions (it was good for morale), but a common language certainly aided interdenominational cooperation.

If Fraser’s Quebec and Roman superiors did not understand Gaelic, they had an even more difficult time tolerating his dress, manner, and customs. The priest rode through his pastorate on horseback, stopping in remote clearings to offer instruction and guidance. He “conducted liturgy in places that were not dedicated houses of worship,” was as comfortable working in the fields and fishing in the streams as presiding in the church, and had a conciliatory attitude toward those Presbyterian brethren that crossed his path.²² In a study of electioneering in Nova Scotia, Brian Cuthbertson has illustrated that in eastern Nova Scotia, the “ties of Scottish nationality proved stronger than the divisions of religion.”²³ It was Fraser’s opinion, and that of most of his people, that in any scenario whereby a Scottish Catholic could not hold a seat in the provincial assembly, better it be a Presbyterian representative as “brither Scots” could best serve the interests of his flock.²⁴

Yet, as the “heather priests” in eastern Nova Scotia conducted their mission with an ethos of old Catholicism and cooperation with Scottish Presbyterians, the Catholic world beyond was turning toward ultramontan-

ism. Often depicted as the victory of conservatives over liberals, ultramontanism was cultivated in broad phases. Undoubtedly it was in conflict with modernity, but also it signaled a rise in the prestige and authority, both temporal and spiritual, of the Holy See, the revival of old religious orders, such as the Society of Jesus, and a general admonishment of the Liberal-Catholic movement. It was, as one historian has argued, “a militant and triumphant resurgence of Catholic piety, Church life and papal power.”²⁵ As power in the Catholic world became bureaucratized and centralized, philosophies, procedures, liturgy, and fashion took on a newfound importance. Most importantly, the curia expected small Catholic communities throughout the world to conform to the practices of Rome.

In the short term European philosophies had little influence on the “heather priests” of the remote settlements on the fringes of empire. In 1825 Father Fraser was elevated to Vicar Apostolic of Nova Scotia (Rome could not find an Irishman) and made Bishop of Halifax in 1842. For the Scottish pioneers of the colony’s hinterland, the elevation of their woodsman bishop was an ecclesiastical honour, but for the more cosmopolitan Irish in the garrison city of Halifax it was humiliating. Working hard to secure an Irish prelate of their own, the Halifax Catholics eventually convinced Dublin and Rome to send Bishop William Walsh to Nova Scotia as Fraser’s coadjutor. It was an acrimonious period and, despite the propensity in official reports to blame the quarrelling on parochial matters and ethnic differences, it was the growth of ultramontanism in the Irish Church, transported from the Irish College in Rome to the Halifax parishes, that accounted for much of the discord. The complaints of the more urbane and gentrified Halifax community against Bishop Fraser and the role of Paul Cardinal Cullen²⁶ in dividing Nova Scotia into two dioceses in 1844 have been well documented.²⁷

To argue that Archbishop Walsh disliked Bishop Fraser would be an understatement. According to Walsh, Fraser did not “live like a bishop, nor perform the duties of a bishop.” In fact, having visited Antigonish on a number of occasions, Walsh concluded that the bishop’s habits were “those of the plainest farmer.”²⁸ When the Scottish prelate died in 1851, the ultramontanes were determined that the Catholic culture of the “heather” be removed from Nova Scotia, and the man they chose for this task was Colin Francis MacKinnon. An Antigonish native and son of Scottish émigrés, MacKinnon was one of the diocese’s early graduates of the Urban College of the Propaganda Fide in Rome. Despite his Scottish heritage and his familiarity with Gaelic customs, Archbishop Walsh in

Halifax considered MacKinnon to be “*the* man, the *only* man for the crisis.”²⁹ In a letter to the rector of the Irish College, Walsh wrote that MacKinnon was “an ornament of the Propaganda,” who “reflecte[d] much glory on his great alma mater.” In short, despite his ethnic and cultural drawbacks, MacKinnon was Roman enough to effect change in Arichat.³⁰

Archbishop Walsh consecrated the “worthy and most eminent” MacKinnon at Halifax in 1852, and the Romanization of eastern Nova Scotia began immediately. Returning to Arichat, MacKinnon was “escorted ceremonially” to his old parish “by a long cavalcade” of parishioners. This significant moment was, as the church historian A. A. Johnston illustrated, “the first time within the Diocese the prescribed niceties of ecclesiastical decorum were duly observed.”³¹ Indeed, as Father P. J. Nicolson, an expert in Celtic customs, showed, MacKinnon’s inaugural pastoral letter placed the diocese “under the patronage of the mother of God, the Blessed Virgin Mary, Help of Christians, and Refuge of Sinners.”³²

Bishop MacKinnon was conscious that both Halifax and Rome expected much of him, and he sought to shape Fraser’s diocese into a Catholic community worthy of the new ultramontane order.³³ Firstly, he set out to rein in the clergy and institute a programme of discipline. He castigated priests (even family members) who were not living up to the standards of the priesthood. One clergyman wrote that MacKinnon’s reprimand was fit “only to be sent to dog.”³⁴ He had a number of roving clergy from Scotland who were unreliable at best. One such priest, MacKinnon’s successor at his old parish, was transferred after only eight months due to rather shocking indiscretions, forcing the bishop to admonish the “foolish and imprudent” members of the St. Andrew’s flock that came to that priest’s defense.³⁵ In 1854 MacKinnon held a diocesan synod, the first of its kind in the area, and demanded his priests to accept selected canonical decrees.³⁶

MacKinnon was convinced that a disciplined clergy would produce a more devotional lifestyle among average Catholics. In communities like Pictou, very few Scots made their Easter duties, and the rest were so pitiful that at least one priest wanted to send them “right to the devil.”³⁷ At a confirmation tour in 1853, Catholics well over the age of seventy years came forth to receive a sacrament that had previously been unavailable.³⁸ No longer would roving priests from Scotland and Quebec be permitted to minister to the flock. As a “mitred schoolmaster,” MacKinnon focussed his tremendous energy on education and particularly seminary training. When

two brothers donated a parcel of land near Antigonish in support of the fledging educational institution, they were presented with medals and informed that the Holy Father had ordered their names to be “inscribed upon the tablets of the Propaganda.”³⁹ This new educational endeavour, MacKinnon wrote to Rome, “correspond[ed] with the requirements and progress of the age.”⁴⁰

MacKinnon’s plan for his local school system was ambitious. He wanted the small educational institutions of the diocese to feed students into the seminary. Religious training extended right through to the teaching professions as teachers were next to the priest in terms of public utility, albeit “at a vast interval from him.”⁴¹ By 1856 two of the seminary’s “Eleves” had been elevated to the “sacred order of the priesthood,” and in 1858 *The Casket* wrote that “the six native born and native trained priests” would endear Bishop MacKinnon “forever to the hearts of his spiritual children.”⁴² By 1860 the roving Scottish priests, much despised by Halifax and Rome, were gone and local boys could pass through the schoolhouse to ordination all within a few miles of their farms.⁴³

Although most aspiring clergy in the diocese remained at home for seminary training or enrolled at one of the Quebec institutions, MacKinnon understood that the real pathway to power in the ultramontane church was through a Roman seminary. The local boys that returned from the Urban Colleges were undisputed ultramontanists. “It would be unpardonable in a letter from Rome the not mentioning the great star [Pius IX],” wrote one student in 1847, “our most glorious pope inspires into the minds of his people, into the minds of all Catholics, the same transports which Plato imagined the visions of *virtue* would inspire.”⁴⁴ Plucked from towns and villages throughout North America, the young men who studied in Rome were gentrified, urbane, and confident that they would soon be leaders in their local communities. Priests who were denied the luxury of an education at the Propaganda felt somewhat second-class. As one Irish-born priest wrote to New York’s Archbishop, John Hughes, in 1859: “I am so disgusted with these Propagandists – seeing the undue influence they have at Rome, that I am forced to be ungenerous towards the American Roman College. If such are the men that Rome produces for this country then, I say, the *fewer* there are the *better*.”⁴⁵

As MacKinnon continued to foster a more disciplined priesthood, topped-up by graduates of Italian seminaries, the physical infrastructure of the diocese also required Romanization. Paintings were procured from respectable Italian artists and, in short order, the parishes of Arichat,

Antigonish, and Arisaig had sufficient artwork to accompany the new missals, breviaries, sacred vessels, and sacred vestments. They were said to be worthy of “the capella Sistina in the Vatican at Rome.”⁴⁶ The altar piece of the Arichat cathedral was “presented to the Church,” wrote *The Casket*, by their bishop who, while living in Rome, “cultivated a natural innate born taste for the fine arts from his long sojourn in that city.”⁴⁷ Pastoral letters dictating custom on everything from doctrine to church music were issued, and the common practice of singing Vespers “on all Sundays and Holy Days” was extended throughout the diocese.⁴⁸ Within months of his consecration, MacKinnon organized the first collection, with all “zeal and warmth,” for the French Association of the Propagation of the Faith (indulgences were offered for those who attended meetings), knowing that money from that French organization would soon pour into the diocese.⁴⁹

In 1857 the feast of Corpus Christi was celebrated at the Trappist Monastery in Tracadie with music provided by the nuns of La Trappe. The procession, which followed the Mass, was extremely ornate by the standards of the period. A cross bearer, followed by musicians and laity with banners, led a group of children “clad in snow white dresses with wreaths of flowers encircling their brows.” Lastly, men carried “under a canopy” the Blessed Sacrament which was continually incensed by two acolytes, while children “strewed the path with flowers.”⁵⁰ In 1820s the Catholics of eastern Nova Scotia and PEI scarcely saw a priest, let alone received the sacraments, yet just forty years later the Holy Eucharist, paraded for adoration, inspired one local correspondent to quote Pope Urban IV: “O Most excellent sacrament! Sacrament most worthy to be adored, revered, glorified, honoured, exalted with most singular praises, recommended by the loudest acclamations.”

All of these changes within the Catholic community in eastern Nova Scotia had an effect on the customs of the people. While Catholics obviously had better access to clergy, most recognized that this was a different breed of priest. More learned and gentrified clergymen replaced the “heather priests” of Nova Scotia, so “physically equipped for the hard work of the frontier.”⁵¹ The sharp contrast between the hunting rifle of Bishop Fraser and the golden mitre of his successor was a stark reminder of those changes. While Fraser had snared rabbits and skinned deer, MacKinnon had a crozier that was a product of “the most ingenious and elaborate workmanship,” and the chalice and patena were “apparently of purest virgin gold.”⁵² Moreover, organs such as *The Casket* were intent on

illustrating this new modern age of Catholicism. No longer did Catholics have to suffer churches that were “rude in construction and void of all architectural beauty”; in Scottish communities like Mabou and Broad Cove, Cape Breton, the new buildings were “ornaments to the country” and “permanent index[es] to the religious feeling of its pastor[s] and people.”⁵³

The gentrification of the clergy had a particular impact on the Gaelic language. Although the language remained predominant in most dwellings, it had begun its rapid decline. So central to the Catholicism of the Highlands of Scotland, its importance to the church in eastern Nova Scotia was diminished. Although there is evidence that MacKinnon occasionally sermonized his flock in the old language, his usage was nothing like his predecessor. Italian and Latin was the language of Rome, something the Curia reminded the bishop of when they rejected one of his reports composed in English.⁵⁴ Young seminarians that returned to Nova Scotia from Rome and Quebec had forgotten much of their mother tongue and were certainly not about to sermonize in the old language.⁵⁵ In 1858, Father Allan MacLean, pastor at Judique, Cape Breton, gave a Gaelic sermon at the chapel in Antigonish. “The beauty of his expressions” noted the local paper, proved “that in point of strength, and elegance of its rhetorical figures, the now almost forgotten language of our forefathers is not surpassed by any in the world.”⁵⁶ Gaelic remained important to the Catholics of Arichat, but it was no longer the principle language of their faith.

From Bishop MacKinnon’s perspective, the Romanization of his diocese was successful. Yet for Archbishop Walsh in Halifax and his Irish ultramontane superiors, MacKinnon was a bitter disappointment. Despite MacKinnon’s progress, as early as 1852 Walsh learned that the Arichat bishop was emulating some of his predecessor’s intolerable behavior. Like Bishop Fraser, MacKinnon had little interest residing next to his cathedral in inclement Arichat. Rather than live in a settlement of mainly Acadian and Irish Catholics, MacKinnon wanted to reside with his Highland flock in his St. Andrew’s parish. In December 1852, Archbishop Walsh wrote his superiors to complain that MacKinnon, like his late predecessor, was living “in a totally rural place where there is not even a village.” Once again, argued Walsh, clanship and kinship between the bishop and clergy were the greatest obstacles to progress in Arichat.

It was Walsh’s opinion in 1852, as it was in 1845, that the only way to force the bishop of Arichat to reside beside his cathedral was to “divide

the clans” and limit the diocese to the island of Cape Breton.⁵⁷ MacKinnon responded to these charges by showing that there were more Catholics in the mainland county of Sydney than in all of Halifax and that “if the more populous place had to be selected, the Episcopal See would have to be located in the town of Antigonish.”⁵⁸ Bishop MacKinnon’s Scottish kin, parishioners, and clergy were aware of the pressure that he was under to conform to the dictates of his ultramontane superiors, and the reluctant transfer from St. Andrew’s to Arichat in 1853 was unpopular with the spiritual flock. It was, after all, as MacKinnon illustrated to the curia, “the Scots of [the] region” who built a bishop’s residence in Antigonish and it was the Scots who were “now busy with the humanities in [the] schools.”

Although MacKinnon remained in Arichat for five years, he returned to Antigonish in 1858 to open a diocesan college in that town. Arichat was “a very nice place,” but it was not suitable for a college. There were many “wishing for the change,” and a seminary would be a benefit “to [the] poor highlanders.” An incensed Archbishop Walsh wrote to Rome charging that MacKinnon was going to “squander” his money on an institution in the “obscure village of Antigonish where Dr. Fraser buried himself for so many years.” Besides the cost, argued Walsh, MacKinnon’s college would do nothing more than “flood the country with a set of ignorant half-educated priests, and perpetuate a race of men who have been a disgrace to religion for the last thirty years in that unfortunate region.”⁵⁹

Clearly, by 1858, MacKinnon was no longer interested in the dictates of his Roman superiors. In fact, by 1860 he had lost much of his enthusiasm for ultramontaniam on a local level. Officially he remained supportive of wider aims of the European ultramontane movement, but encyclicals such as the *Syllabus of Errors* (1864) were written for a European and not a Nova Scotian audience, and so he paid scant attention. Also, MacKinnon had given up any hope of cultivating a friendly relationship with his Irish superiors in Halifax. He had participated in Archbishop Walsh’s funeral in 1858, but he was downright offensive to the archbishop’s successor, Thomas Louis Connolly, and almost restarted the ethnic quarrels that had plagued the province twenty years previously.

Yet, even in far-off Nova Scotia, the 1860s were a time of trial for Catholicism, and MacKinnon could not avoid the reach of ultramontaniam for long. This was especially the case during the debate over the dogma of papal infallibility. Even in the burgeoning college town of Antigonish, in which the dogma of Immaculate Conception had been accepted without

question in 1854, papal infallibility proved problematic. Although the Pope's spiritual authority was of little consequence to the local community, it was one further step away from the ethos of the "heather priests" and one step in the direction of Halifax, Ireland, and Rome. Moreover, by 1861 the debate over the dogma pushed Father John Schulte, a German-born, Urban College educated, purser and professor at the Antigonish seminary to quit the Catholic Church altogether. Schulte had dedicated his missionary life to Nova Scotia and he was an important figure within the diocese, but he was also struggling with the new tenets of Rome. "In a word," he wrote years later "I had to distinguish and separate the purely *Roman* from the purely *Catholic*, rejecting the former and adhering to the latter."⁶⁰

Father Schulte eventually resurfaced in Upper Canada as a priest in the Church of England. His later writings solve some of the mystery surrounding his defection, but it is obvious there were other local factors involved. For one thing, despite his relationship with MacKinnon, on matters of diocesan education and general authority, Schulte was very much second fiddle to the young ultramontane, Father John Cameron. Although both priests were alumni of the Propaganda College, philosophically they were quite different. Cameron, a former star pupil at the propaganda (even serving briefly as rector during a vacancy in the office), was a devotee of Paul Cardinal Cullen and a committed ultramontanist.⁶¹ He was connected in Rome and, even as a seminarian, he began to pen letters to MacKinnon writing "officially" on behalf of one cardinal or another.

To priests like Schulte it was obvious that Father John Cameron would soon control the diocese. The young priest may have been a native Gaelic-speaker, but he was a Roman in heart, mind, and deed. Gentrified, bookish, and devotional, Cameron could not have been more different than his "heather priest" predecessors. His letters from the seminary were filled with references to Pius IX (the noblest of nobles), hints at the necessity of infallibility, and chastisement of friends and family back in Nova Scotia. When told that MacKinnon did not want to leave his rural parish for Arichat, Cameron suggested that the bishop should obey as "God called his noble soul to greater things."

Bishop MacKinnon genuinely liked Father Cameron, knew his family, and admired his erudition; yet MacKinnon was canny enough to recognize that Rome was Cameron's country. He understood that the priest not only had a direct line to powerful Roman officials, but also that his

descriptions of the diocese, and indeed the region, would be accepted as canon by the curia. As early as 1853, MacKinnon admitted that Cameron was his “right hand,” and, within a decade of his ordination, Cameron assumed the roles of rector of the local college, rector of the cathedral, and vicar-general. Moreover, when it came time for MacKinnon to put forward a name for a possible coadjutor in 1867, Cameron’s was the only name proposed.

By identifying Father Cameron as his successor, Bishop MacKinnon unwittingly became snared in a global movement that eventually cost him his position. In an important article, Colin Barr has illustrated that, from 1832, Paul Cardinal Cullen “set out with great success to mould the Roman Catholic Church in the English-speaking world to his vision of Catholicism.”⁶² Through a vast network of Irish clergy ministering in both Europe and the colonies, Cullen was able to create what Barr has described as a “Hibernio-Roman” Catholic Empire in the New World. Importantly, this “Hibernio-Roman conquest of the English – speaking Churches” was not accidental, but was rather a “systematic, well planned and centrally directed operation.”⁶³

As Barr has illustrated, Cullen wanted this network of bishops “to be both Irish *and* Roman,” but, in Cameron’s case, it was sufficient to be both Scottish and Roman. Cameron’s devotion to Cardinal Cullen went back to his days at the propaganda, and the Scot later recalled that he owed more to the Irish prelate “than to any other man living or dead.”⁶⁴ Cameron’s devoutness to the prelate who had “worked hard to get [Archbishop Walsh] into the harness” and thereby humiliated Bishop Fraser in 1842, was not lost on the older clergy.⁶⁵ On 22 May 1870, while in Rome, Father Cameron was consecrated as coadjutor bishop for Arichat by Cullen, promptly took his seat at the Vatican Council, and “stoutly supported the majority judgement on the question of papal infallibility.”⁶⁶ From the beginning Cameron was conscious of his authority and stature. “His Grace, Archbishop Connolly has, since his arrival in Halifax, written a very penitent and supplicating letter to Cardinal Cullen,” Cameron arrogantly wrote a friend after the council, “to assure the authorities here that he most firmly believed in the dogma of Papal Infallibility.”⁶⁷

MacKinnon’s days were clearly numbered once Cameron was consecrated coadjutor bishop for Arichat. In his history of Catholicism in eastern Nova Scotia, Father A. A. Johnston argues that MacKinnon’s retirement in 1877 was due to poor health and declining faculties. It was true that MacKinnon was slowing down; however, it was Cameron’s brutal

assessments of his superior, constant petitions to Rome, and influence among the curia, that finally did MacKinnon in. Complaints about MacKinnon's behavior, the cost of the new cathedral, and the general state of the diocese were the typical grievances. In fact, with the help of the apostolic delegate, Bishop George Conroy, an intimate friend from the propaganda, the removal was carried out with sharp precision. "I congratulate you on the recent negotiations with Dr. MacKinnon," wrote Conroy from Quebec, "at the same time you cannot rest on your oars until the resignation and change of residence shall have passed from the shadowy reign of promises to the solid world of facts."⁶⁸

Cameron's rough treatment of MacKinnon bothered both priests and laity. In the new prelate's own words he "formally *commanded* to seize the reigns."⁶⁹ After MacKinnon's resignation the deposed prelate was not even permitted to reside on the fledgling St. F.X. campus and had to seek residence in a local dwelling. After twenty-six years as bishop, MacKinnon received no support from his superiors. In fact, it was Rome's representative in Canada who essentially forced MacKinnon from his position (and residence), and it was Conroy (through Cardinal Alessandro Franchi) who got the "poor old man" his rather useless honorary appointment as Titular Archbishop of Amida. Most in Arichat, especially MacKinnon's large extended family,⁷⁰ knew that Conroy had the archbishop of Halifax travel to Antigonish to force MacKinnon's resignation.⁷¹

With Cameron's elevation to bishop in 1877, the diocese of Arichat unquestionably grew in stature. "Favorably known at the Vatican,"⁷² powerful Roman allies ensured that Cameron was one of Canada's most powerful prelates, and arguably no Canadian bishop "enjoyed more fully the confidence of the Holy See."⁷³ Through a close personal friendship with the apostolic delegate and various Curia officials, Cameron supplied Rome with information on his regional colleagues and was routinely asked by the Curia to intervene in the affairs of other dioceses (the most well-known was a quarrel between the Archbishop of Halifax and the Sisters of Charity).

Yet Cameron proved a frustration to his Scottish flock. "One of the primary features of the Hiberno-Roman episcopal model," argues Colin Barr, "was an insistence on both lay and clerical obedience."⁷⁴ True to form, Cameron shaped his diocese on this model and soon the acrimony was ubiquitous.⁷⁵ "You stood as much chance of changing the Gulf Stream," recalled one Antigonish priest, "as his Lordship's mind once he

declared it officially.”⁷⁶ The Arichat prelate may have been physically like “the old Highlander,” as his eulogist recalled, but his heart was “thoroughly Roman.”⁷⁷ Although he spoke Gaelic (he even published in the language), like his mentor Cardinal Cullen, Cameron had little sympathy for nationalism, cultural or otherwise. Gaelic would not help develop the Church in Canada. “Without meaning any disparagement to my mother tongue or to those who speak it,” Cameron wrote in 1879, “I must remark that Gaelic is fast dying out, and giving way to the English, and that, even were not this the case its importance is nowise to be compared to that of the French.”⁷⁸

Undoubtedly Bishop Cameron is best known for his forays into local politics on behalf Sir John Thompson. Historians have carefully documented these campaigns and the ensuing acrimony.⁷⁹ Obviously, Cameron’s use of episcopal power to support the conservative candidate angered those Catholics who supported other political parties. Scottish Catholics in Arichat had long argued that the Pope’s influence did not extend into the polling station. When challenged by the Protestant Alliance in the 1850s, *The Casket* responded, “in spiritual matters we submit to his [Pontiff] authority but in all political concerns we do not acknowledge in him any power that might interfere with the laws, rights, or privileges of any nation.”⁸⁰ Yet, by the 1880s, Cameron was arguing that those who refused to support his candidate were ultimately “pretend Catholics.”

Interestingly, by demanding that Catholics vote the episcopal line, Cameron understood that he was interfering with clannish traditions. During the 1885 federal bye-election it was rumored that many families, Chisholms and Grants for example, had supported Thompson’s opponent, Dr. Alexander MacIntosh, because they were from Strathglass, Scotland. In 1886 *The Casket* correspondent, John Corbett, in conversation with an Antigonish county merchant, referenced this “Strathglass theory.” The merchant argued that many residents only supported the Liberal-independent candidate because of “that damn Strathglass click.”⁸¹ “Dr. MacIntosh’s influence among the Strathglass people for any other candidate other than himself is simply unworthy of mention,” Cameron wrote to Thompson, “and shall he venture to take the field himself to oppose you, he shall fare far worse than in 1885.”⁸²

Throughout Cameron’s immersion in local politics he interpreted opposition based on clan voting as “calculated to foment a spirit of insubordination to ecclesiastical authority.”⁸³ When the *Halifax Morning Chronicle* wrote that “when His Lordship pleases to take an active interest

in a political contest he can exercise an all-powerful influence,” there was recognition that ultramontanistism now controlled the province’s Scottish Catholics.⁸⁴ He could speak of his political opponents as “Chickens” and honestly refer to Thompson’s political detractors as “pretend Catholics” precisely because of his belief that Catholicism was invested first in the Pope and then in him as the Pontiff’s representative.⁸⁵ Kinship and traditions of the Scottish Highlanders were best left in the past.

It was not simply politics, however, that made Cameron’s episcopate periodically painful. Throughout his tenure the bishop demanded complete obedience from his flock and maintained his authority with threats of excommunication or denial of Christian burial. Disputes with parishioners over parish boundaries, newspaper editorials, graveyards, and clergy assignments were constant. After the “Heatherton Stampede,” the pastor, Father Roderick Grant, charged with being “unfit to keep charge,” argued that the sad “state of affairs” would exist even if another clergyman were in his place.⁸⁶ Grant understood (his own brother had stampeded out) that the discontent in Heatherton went well beyond local politics.

When Bishop Cameron died in 1910 the situation in Antigonish was so acrimonious that Rome took two years to appoint a successor, triggering fears that the Curia might dismember the diocese altogether. After his funeral, *The Sacred Heart Review* editorialized that Cameron was “a typical representative of the Highland pastor – a class of men who not only saved the faith in Scotland but bore so large a part in transplanting its vigorous roots to this continent.”⁸⁷ Yet the Scots of Antigonish knew that the late prelate was nothing like the “heather priests” of old. Moreover, as the “Heatherton Stampede” illustrates, faced with the recognition that formal protests were futile, many Scots of Antigonish restored to public defiance as the only means of protesting forty years of ultramontanistism in eastern Nova Scotia.

Endnotes

1. The Diocese of Antigonish was known as Arichat from 1844 to 1886. In reference to events before 1886 in this paper, the diocese will be called Arichat and, after 1886, Antigonish.
2. R.A. Maclean, *Bishop John Cameron: Piety & Politics* (Antigonish: The Casket, 1991), 155.
3. A smaller “stampede” occurred in the parish of Mabou, Cape Breton, during the reading of the same instruction.

4. Bishop Cameron aided Sir John Thompson's provincial election campaigns in 1877, 1878, and 1882, and federally in 1885, 1887, and 1891.
5. MacLean, *Piety & Politics*, 156.
6. D. Hugh Gillis, "Sir John Thompson's Elections," *Canadian Historical Review* 37 (1956): 23.
7. See D Campbell and R. A. MacLean, *Beyond the Atlantic Road: A Study of the Nova Scotia Scots* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1974). For an interesting account of the Scottishness of Antigonish see *Sacred Heart Review* 51, no. 5 (17 January 1914).
8. Lisa G. Curry, *Catholicism and the Clan MacDonnell of GlenGarry: Religion and Politics in the Highlands of Scotland, 1650-1750* (Lewiston: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2007), 202.
9. J.W. McIsaac, "Our Scottish Catholic Heritage," *Mosgladh*, no. 1 (1922): 27.
10. J. Derek Holmes, *More Roman than Rome: English Catholicism in the Nineteenth Century* (London: Burns & Oates), 59.
11. *The Casket*, 11 March 1858.
12. Dan MacInnes, "The legacy of Highland "heather" priests in Eastern Canada," in *Keeping the Kirk: Scottish Religion at Home and in the Diaspora*, eds. Daniel MacLeod and Stuart Macdonald (Guelph: Guelph Series in Scottish Studies, 2014), 88-89.
13. A. A. Johnston, *The First Five Bishops of the Diocese of Antigonish* (Antigonish, n.d.), 5.
14. MacInnes, "Heather Priests," 90-91; Johnston, *A History of the Catholic Church, II*, 16.
15. Father Remi Gaulin to Bishop Joseph-Octave Plessis, 4 August 1817, I.M, 45, Archdiocese of Quebec Archives (hereafter AQA).
16. Mason Wade, "Relations between the French, Irish and Scottish Clergy in the Maritime Provinces, 1774-1836," *CCHA Study Sessions* 39 (1972): 25.
17. Curry, *Catholicism and the Clan MacDonell*, 205.
18. Curry, *Catholicism and the Clan MacDonell*, 205-6.
19. MacInnes, "Heather Priests," 91.

20. Johnston, *A History of the Catholic Church, II*, 436; A. A. Johnston, 'The Right Reverend William Fraser Second Vicar Apostolic of Nova Scotia First Bishop of Halifax and First Bishop of Arichat' *CCHA Report* (1935-36), 24.
21. Bishop Angus B. MacEachen to Bishop Joseph Octave Plessis, 10 August 1822, PEI Fonds, 83, AQA.
22. MacInnes, "Heather Priests," 93.
23. Brian Cuthbertson, *Johnny Bluenose at the Polls: Epic Nova Scotian Election Battles 1758-1848* (Halifax: Formac, 1994), 262.
24. Cuthbertson, *Johnny Bluenose*, 302.
25. Mark McGowan, *The Waning of the Green: Catholics, the Irish, and Identity in Toronto, 1887-1922* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1999), 91.
26. Although Cullen was not given the red hat until 1866, he is known as Cardinal Cullen throughout this essay.
27. Colin Barr, "Imperium in Imperio": Irish Episcopal Imperialism in the Nineteenth Century," *English Historical Review* 123, no. 502 (2008): 621-24; Brian Hanington, *Every Popish Person: The Story of Roman Catholicism in Nova Scotia and the Church of Halifax, 1604-1984* (Halifax, 1984); Johnston, *A History of the Catholic Church, II*, 198-215; and Terrence Murphy, "Trusteeism in Atlantic Canada: The Struggle for Leadership among the Irish Catholics of Halifax, St. John's, and Saint John, 1780-1850," in *Creed and Culture: The Place of English-Speaking Catholics in Canadian Society, 1750-1930*, eds. Terrence Murphy and Gerald Stortz (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1993).
28. William Walsh to Tobias Kirby, 2 February 1843, Bishop William Walsh Papers, Archdiocese of Halifax Archives.
29. William Walsh to Tobias Kirby, 2 August 1850, KIR/748, Kirby Collection, Irish College Archives.
30. Walsh to Kirby, 2 August 1850, KIR/748, Irish College Archives.
31. Johnston, *A History of the Roman Catholic Church, II*, 269.
32. P.J. Nicholson, "Marion Devotion in the Diocese of Antigonish, Nova Scotia" *CCHA Report*, 21 (1954): 106.
33. Colin F. MacKinnon to Cardinal Prefect of the Propaganda, 20 November 1854, Fonds 2, Series 1, Sub-Series 1, Colin F. MacKinnon Papers (hereafter CFMP), Antigonish Diocesan Archives (hereafter ADA).

34. Colin F. Mackinnon to Hugh MacDonald, 19 August 1854, Fonds 2, Series, 1, Sub-Series 1, CFMP, ADA.
35. Colin F. MacKinnon to Mr. Chisholm, 28 December 1853, Fonds 2, Series, 1, Sub-Series 1, CFMP, ADA.
36. Johnston, *A History of the Catholic Church II*, 275.
37. Schulte quoted in Colin F. MacKinnon to John Schulte, 30 April 1855, Fonds 2, Series, 1, Sub-Series 1, CFMP, ADA.
38. *The Casket*, 25 August 1853.
39. *The Casket*, 18 November 1858.
40. Johnston, *A History of the Catholic Church, II*, 294.
41. *The Casket*, 9 October 1856.
42. *The Casket*, 9 October 1856.
43. *The Casket*, 16 September 1858.
44. John Cameron to Lachlan Cameron, 14 June 1847, Fonds 8, Series 4, Sub-Series 1, A. A. Johnston Papers (hereafter AAJP), ADA.
45. Thomas Heyden to John Hughes, n.d. [1859?], Folder 13, Box 3, Archbishop John Hughes Collection, Archives of the Archdiocese of New York.
46. *The Casket*, 25 June 1857.
47. *The Casket*, 25 June 1857.
48. Johnston, *A History of the Catholic Church, II*, 290.
49. *The Casket*, 9 December 1852.
50. *The Casket*, 18 June 1857.
51. MacInnes, "Heather Priests," 104.
52. *The Casket*, 25 June 1857. See also, MacInnes, "Heather Priests," 104.
53. *The Casket*, 8 July 1858.
54. Johnston, *A History of the Catholic Church, II*, 286.
55. Maclean, *Piety & Politics*, 20.
56. *The Casket*, 30 September 1858.

57. William Walsh to Paul Cullen, 18 January 1845, CUL/1010, Cullen Collection, Irish College Archives.
58. Unpublished Report on the Founding of St. F.X., MG45/2/320-333, William X. Edwards Papers, St. Francis Xavier University Archives.
59. William Walsh to Tiobas Kirby, 28 January 1858, KIR/1359, Kirby Collection, Irish College Archives.
60. John Schulte, *Roman Catholicism Old and New from the Standpoint of the Infallibility Doctrine* (Toronto: Belford Brothers, 1876), 9. For information on Schulte see H. M. MacDonald, *The Rector: A Biography of Reverend John Schulte, D.D., Ph.D. First President of St. Francis Xavier University* (Antigonish: The Casket, 1976).
61. Johnston, *A History of the Catholic Church, II*, 297.
62. Barr, "Imperium in Imperio," 650.
63. Barr, "Imperium in Imperio," 645.
64. *Silver Jubilee Booklet of the Consecration of His Lordship Bishop Cameron* (Antigonish, 1895), 36.
65. Barr, "Imperium in Imperio," 622.
66. Johnston, *A History of Catholicism, II*, 416.
67. John Cameron to Patrick Power, 27 August 1870, Fonds 3, Series 1, Sub-series 1, Bishop John Cameron Papers (hereafter BJCP), ADA.
68. George Conroy to John Cameron, 4 August 1877, Fonds 2, Series 1, Sub-series 1, CFMP, ADA.
69. John Cameron to William Miller, 19 February 1877, Fonds 3, Series 1, Sub-series 1, BJCP, ADA.
70. Hugh Gillis to John Cameron, 8 August 1877, Fonds 2, Series 1, Sub-Series 1, CFMP, ADA.
71. George Conroy to John Cameron, 20 June 1877, Fonds 2, Series 1, Sub-series 1, CFMP, ADA. Also, Michael Hannan to John Cameron, 8 July 1877, Fonds 2, Series 1, Sub-Series 1, CFMP, ADA.
72. John Cameron to John Thompson, 30 August 1890, Letter #12942, Library and Archives Canada (hereafter LAC).

73. "Brief Sketch of the Life of Most Reverend John Cameron D. D. Founder of Sisters of St Martha," January 1951, Fonds 3, Series 1, Sub-series 1, BJCP, ADA.
74. Barr, "'Imperium in Imperio,'" 646.
75. Barr, "'Imperium in Imperio,'" 646.
76. J. L. MacDougall, "Cameron Remembered," 28 April 1910, Fonds 3, Series 1, Sub-Series 1, BJCP, ADA.
77. "Brief Sketch of the Life of Most Reverend John Cameron D.D. Founder of Sisters of St Martha," January 1951, Fonds 3, Series 1, Sub-series 1, BJCP, ADA.
78. John Cameron to Thompson, 3 March 1879, Letter #636, LAC.
79. D. Hugh Gillis, "Sir John Thompson and Bishop Cameron," *CCHA Report 22* (1955): 87-97; Gillis, "Sir John Thompson's Elections," 23-45; P.B. Waite, "Annie and the Bishop: John S.D. Thompson goes to Ottawa, 1885," *Dalhousie Review 57* (Winter 1977-8): 605-18; and P. B. Waite, *The Man from Halifax: Sir John Thompson Prime Minister* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1985).
80. *The Casket*, 3 June 1858.
81. R. A MacLean, *The Casket 1852-1992: From Gutenberg to the Internet* (Antigonish: The Casket Publishing, 1996), 53.
82. John Cameron to John Thompson, 4 December 1886, Letter #3648, LAC.
83. MacLean, *The Casket 1852-1992*, 60.
84. *Halifax Morning Chronicle*, 5 December 1877.
85. John Cameron to John Thompson, 1 March 1886, Letter #3684, LAC.
86. Roderick Grant to John Cameron, June 1897, Fonds 3, Series 3, Sub-series 1, BJCP, ADA.
87. *The Sacred Heart Review 43*, no. 17 (16 April 1910).