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# The Bible Question in Prince Edward Island from 1856 to 1860

“A serious and most unaccountable misunderstanding,” was what Edward Whelan, the leading Roman Catholic Liberal, in early 1857 described as the root of the Bible question in Prince Edward Island.<sup>1</sup> There was indeed a misunderstanding, but after it had been cleared up the conflict remained, and with the Bible question began a new era in the history of the colony. For the next two decades religion and education would provide the primary motive power in Island politics. This article concerns the period between 1856 and 1860, when the most important political issue, at least for the Protestant majority, was the place the Holy Scriptures, the Word of God, were to occupy in the educational system. The demand for “the open Bible in the schools” turned out of office the Liberal Party that had brought responsible government, and in its place installed an all-Protestant administration in a colony whose population was almost one-half Roman Catholic.

The Prince Edward Island which was about to be shaken by the Bible question was a vital, aggressive society, full of energy and self-confidence. A non-resident proprietor wrote in 1853 that “removed as they are from all intercourse with the world, these narrow-minded Provincials really fancy themselves *par excellence* THE people of British North America.”<sup>2</sup> The bulk of the Islanders were young and native-born. In the census of 1848 only 7,837 of 62,678 inhabitants were over the age of 45; in 1855, 9,432 of 71,496; and in 1861, 11,195 of 80,857.<sup>3</sup> Between 1848 and 1861 the proportion of the non-native-born declined from 30 to 22.1 percent.<sup>4</sup> Andrew Hill Clark has estimated “that, in the early 1850’s, something just under half of the population called itself Scottish, about one-tenth was clearly Acadian, and of the rest more claimed ancestors from England than from Ireland. Kings and Queens counties were still overwhelmingly Scottish and Scots were scattered through Prince as well, especially in the eastern townships . . . The Irish were the most evenly distributed but showed particular concentrations near the two county

1 Prince Edward Island, House of Assembly, *Debates and Proceedings*, 1857, p. 61.

2 B. W. A. Sleight, *Pine Forests and Hacmatack Clearings* (London, 1853), p. 174.

3 See *Censuses of Canada. 1665 to 1871*, IV (Ottawa, 1876), pp. 174, 360-61; PEI, Assembly, *Journal*, 1856, appendix D.

4 See Andrew Hill Clark, *Three Centuries and the Island* (Toronto, 1959), p. 121, Table V.

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boundary lines.”<sup>5</sup> In religion, the Island was approximately 55 percent Protestant, and among the Protestants counted at the censuses of 1848, 1855, and 1861 Presbyterians constituted a steady 58 percent.<sup>6</sup> There were four Presbyterian groups with significant followings: Kirkmen, Secessionists, Free Churchmen, and McDonaldites (a group scattered throughout the Island and held together by the extraordinary personality of the Rev. Donald McDonald, an itinerant preacher who described himself as a Kirkman). Among Island Protestants who were not Presbyterians of one variety or another, about one-third were Anglican, another third were Wesleyan, and the remaining third belonged to the Baptist or Bible Christian churches, the latter an offshoot of the Wesleyan Church. Probably more than one-half of the Roman Catholic population were Irish, and the majority of these had come before the Famine of the 1840s. Most of the Catholics of Scottish origin could trace their arrival on the Island to the late 18th century, and, by virtue of their long establishment in the colony, supplied most of the priests.<sup>7</sup> Although the Acadians had first arrived in the early 1700s, they were still, in the middle of the 19th century, cowed by their dispersal in 1758, and they kept to themselves as best they could. There is little evidence of national friction between the Irish settlers and the Scottish Roman Catholics, for the bulk of the new arrivals were as inoffensive as their Gaelic-speaking co-religionists.

One major incident involving religious conflict had occurred on 1 March 1847 at a byelection in Belfast, in south-eastern Queens county, where a pitched battle took place between several hundred Scottish Protestants and Irish Roman Catholics armed with cudgels. At least three men died, scores were injured, the colony was shocked, and it never happened again.<sup>8</sup> Bitter words were exchanged many times in the ensuing decades, but physical violence on the scale of 1847 was not repeated. In the long perspective of Prince Edward Island history, the Belfast Riot stands out as an exceptional event, an electoral affray in which nationality, class, and party may have been as important as religion. The surprising circumstance for a colony so evenly divided was the dearth of religious hostility. Much of this was due to the remarkable personality of Angus B. MacEachern, the first Bishop of Charlottetown. A jovial and energetic man, with friends of every religious persuasion, he was for many years the only Roman Catholic priest in Prince Edward Island, Cape Breton, the Magdalen Islands, and parts of New Brunswick.

5 *Ibid.*, p. 91; also see p. 88, on the problems involved in trying to be more precise.

6 Calculations based on *Censuses of Canada. 1665 to 1871*, IV, pp. 174, 359; PEI, Assembly, *Journal*, 1856, app. D.

7 See John C. Macmillan, *Early History of the Catholic Church in Prince Edward Island* (Quebec, 1905), pp. 46-49.

8 See PEI, Assembly, *Journal*, 1847, app. I, and H. T. Holman, “William Douse,” *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, IX (forthcoming). Inquests were held for two Irishmen and one Scot.

From the time he was made bishop in 1819 until his death 16 years later, the British government had given him an annual pension of 50 pounds "for religious purposes."<sup>9</sup>

The Island government during most of the 1850s was Liberal. The Liberal Party had come to power in 1851 through the struggle for responsible government. They consolidated their position by extending the franchise to make it virtually universal for adult males, carrying through a programme of moderate reform on the land question, and making the district schools free of tuition.<sup>10</sup> "Free education," as it was known, was particularly important on the Island because the neo-feudal land system inhibited creation of agricultural surpluses which, although bringing cash, could also attract the attention of assiduous land agents. The result could be an increase in rent, or, in extreme cases, eviction without compensation for improvements. Hence cash was a rare commodity in rural Prince Edward Island, and country districts often experienced great difficulty in raising even the modest salary of a schoolmaster. The Free Education Act, passed in 1852, obviated this problem. Teachers paid under the act were specifically forbidden to demand tuition fees, and local assessment was to be used only for the erection and maintenance of school buildings. Within two years enrolment doubled.<sup>11</sup> The blossoming of the educational system, and the commitment of the colony to it, generated new demands for quality and uniformity. The agent for this transformation was to be John M. Stark, a Scottish school visitor recruited in 1853 from David Stow's Normal School in Glasgow especially for the purpose.<sup>12</sup> A conscientious man who would not compromise with laziness or incompetence, Stark quickly made himself unpopular by his rigorous criticism of all who came under his eye. In his second annual report, he stated that "I could scarce have believed that there could have been in any part of the world so numerous a staff of teachers who so few had even the shadow of a qualification for their important office."<sup>13</sup> In retaliation, angry and ill-paid teachers poured anonymous abuse on him through the columns of the press. Yet the Liberal government continued to support him, and withstood pressure to dismiss him or lower his salary.

- 9 MacEachern to the Rev. Angus MacDonald, 10 August 1830. The original letter is in the Archives of the Scots College, Rome. A copy is in the possession of Father Francis W. P. Bolger of the University of Prince Edward Island, who kindly brought it to this writer's attention.
- 10 See Ian Ross Robertson, "George Coles," *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, X (Toronto, 1972), pp. 183-86, and "Edward Whelan," *ibid.*, IX (forthcoming).
- 11 See 15 Vic., c. 13; PEI, Assembly, *Journal*, 1858, app. T, 1st page.
- 12 See "J.G.F-h" [Joshua Girling Fitch], "David Stow," *Dictionary of National Biography*, XIX (London, 1921-22), pp. 1-2.
- 13 PEI, Assembly, *Journal*, 1858, app. M, p. 63.

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A second means of improving the school system was to be the establishment in Charlottetown of an institution for training teachers in uniform methods of pedagogy. This “Normal School” would be under the supervision of Stark and the other members of the seven-man Board of Education appointed by the government. A master, William Monk, was obtained from Stow’s Normal School through the good offices of Stark, who had known him in Scotland. The formal opening on 1 October 1856 was a gala affair, attended by many prominent public figures. Premier George Coles, who himself had not had the opportunity of obtaining much formal education, declared “this day [to be] the proudest of my life.”<sup>14</sup> Shortly before Coles’ address, Stark had made a speech which was to have the most momentous consequences for the government. A Free Churchman who refused to travel on Sundays, the school visitor wanted to assure the public that the “moral department” of the new institution would include “a daily Bible lesson (the first lesson of the day after opening) in which the truths and facts of Scripture will be brought before the children’s minds by illustrations and picturing out in words, in language simple and easy to be understood, from which everything sectarian and controversial shall be carefully excluded.”<sup>15</sup> Thus began one of the most bizarre and intensely-waged contests in the history of the relations of church and school in Canada. Although no one publicly objected to the remarks by the school visitor, his words began a chain reaction behind the scenes of Island public life. Within two days, a special meeting of the Board of Education had rapped Stark’s knuckles by resolving that no books save those on a list which would be compiled could be used at the Normal School.<sup>16</sup> When the list was published the Bible was absent and was thus excluded.<sup>17</sup> The Board reaffirmed its support for this list at its regular monthly meeting of 30 October.

The Roman Catholic Bishop of Charlottetown, Bernard D. MacDonald, the first native Islander to become a priest, and a member of the Island’s first Board of Education in 1830, also responded vigorously to Stark’s address. On 7 November, unaware of the repudiation of Stark’s statement by the Board, he protested to that body:

14 Robert Blake Irving, *Normal School Soirée: Report of the Speeches and Proceedings at the Inauguration of the Normal School . . .* (Charlottetown, 1956), p. 27. This 40-page account, dated 14 October 1856, was published under the authority of the government; a copy survives in the Public Archives of PEI [PAPEI].

15 *Ibid.*, p. 18.

16 *Monitor* (Charlottetown), 26 March 1858.

17 The list of Normal School regulations, the sixth of which concerned the books to be used, may be found in Irving, *Normal School Soirée*, p. 40.

This introduction of religious matters into our public mixed schools is the Rock of Scandal . . . [I] earnestly beg of the Board to reconsider the evil tendency of introducing religion in any shape into our mixed schools . . . . the same system as that followed in the Irish National Schools must be adopted here.<sup>18</sup> Prayers and all religious exercises, as well as the reading of the Scripture from any version not approved by all, must be discontinued . . . . If the friends of education wish our mixed schools to prosper, their wish can only be realized by allowing those schools to be godless, under the present circumstances of the country. The Catholics, I am bound to say, will be satisfied with nothing else.<sup>19</sup>

The reason for the bishop's delay of more than five weeks in writing was significant: Stark's speech aroused so little public notice on the Island that MacDonald had been unaware of it until he picked up a Roman Catholic newspaper from Halifax, N.S.<sup>20</sup> Moreover, the bishop appears to have been under the mistaken impression that "religious exercises, such as teaching and singing sectarian hymns," were becoming common in the district schools.<sup>21</sup> Consequently, his letter widened the emerging issue from the Normal School, the only institution which Stark had mentioned on 1 October, to include the entire system of district schools.

Premier Coles quickly moved to allay the fears of the bishop. After learning of the letter, he immediately obtained an interview, and assured MacDonald that Stark had been unauthorized in the expression of his sentiments. The bishop then wrote a short note stating that he was "perfectly satisfied" that he had acted as the result of a "misunderstanding," and authorized Coles to

18 For the complexities of the Irish National System in principle and in practice, see Donald H. Akenson, *The Irish Education Experiment: The National System of Education in the Nineteenth Century* (London and Toronto, 1970), particularly chapters V and VI. There is substantial evidence to suggest that MacDonald himself considered even the Irish National System to be less than ideal. In January 1857 he wrote that the district schools "are conducted much in the same manner as the Irish National Schools. And tho' there be many well-founded objections to such schools, yet in the present state of our society it is difficult, if not impolitic to try to do away with them, when the poverty of our Inhabitants generally is taken into consideration." MacDonald to Cardinal Alexandre Barnabo, 15 January 1857, Bishop Bernard D. MacDonald Papers, Archives of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Charlottetown. The author wishes to acknowledge the courtesy of Father Faber MacDonald in allowing him access to this collection. Also see the letter of Father James MacDonald, dated 25 February 1857, in *Examiner* (Charlottetown), 2 March 1857.

19 MacDonald to John MacNeill (Secretary to the Board of Education), 7 November 1856, in *ibid.*, 23 February 1857. Also see letter of MacNeill, dated 2 March 1857, in *ibid.*, 2 March 1857, making verbal corrections in the version published a week earlier.

20 See Kenneth Henderson in PEI, Assembly, *Debates*, 1868, p. 167 and Emanuel McEachen in *ibid.*, 1875, p. 200.

21 MacDonald to MacNeill, 7 November 1856, in *Examiner*, 23 February 1857.

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show his retraction “to all whom it may concern.”<sup>22</sup> Yet the premier failed to do so, a mistake which would eventually cost his party dearly. The bishop, for his part, considered the matter closed and did not bother to explain his change of heart to the Board of Education. In late November his letter went before the regular monthly meeting of the Board, where it caused quite a sensation. Stark was ordered to investigate the nature and extent of Bible-reading in the public schools of the Island. Although immediately informed of the impending inquiry by a letter from John MacNeill, the Secretary to the Board, MacDonald did not trouble to inform the Board that such action was no longer necessary.<sup>23</sup> Stark delivered his report on 22 December, and it showed no cause for the alarm of the bishop: Bible-reading in the district schools was completely permissive, and Roman Catholics were making as much use of this flexibility as were Protestants. In the case of the French Acadian schools, Stark reported that they were singing sectarian hymns as well. If anything, Stark’s report gave evidence of a lack of friction, for only one serious complaint had been lodged with the Board, and it had been resolved. In the past, for lack of other commonly-owned books, the Scriptures had been widely used as a reading text. But the report indicated that as the Irish National Series of readers grew in popularity, Bible-reading proportionally decreased in the schools. In the early 1840s catechisms had often been used, but by 1846 they had disappeared from mixed schools. On 25 December a copy of the report was sent to the bishop, who apparently did not acknowledge its receipt, and who certainly made no public statement on it.<sup>24</sup>

Stark’s report on the state of the Bible in the district schools alarmed a very different group of people: the evangelical Protestants. The decrease in Bible-reading shocked them, and they immediately laid the blame on “the bishop’s letter,” which they had been shown through the courtesy of the Rev. David Fitzgerald, an Anglican clergyman and a member of the Board.<sup>25</sup> This

22 MacDonald to Coles, 16 November 1856, in *ibid.*, 9 February 1857; also see Coles to the Editor of the *Examiner*, dated 6 February 1857, in *ibid.*

23 See MacNeill to MacDonald, 25 December 1856, in *ibid.*, 23 February 1857. In this letter the Secretary refers to his communication of 27 November, the date of the monthly Board meeting.

24 See Stark’s report, dated 22 December 1856, in *ibid.*; the letter of Stark to the Editor of *Haszard’s Gazette*, dated 17 February 1857, in *Islander* (Charlottetown), 20 February 1857; William Swabey to Sir Dominick Daly, 30 June 1858, Colonial Office [CO] 226/89, pp. 201-16, Public Archives of Canada [PAC] microfilm; MacNeill’s reports when he was school visitor in the 1840s: PEI, Assembly, *Journal*, 1842, app. D, pp. 13-14; *ibid.*, 1843, app. B, p. 23; *ibid.*, 1845, app. H, pp. 40-41; and *ibid.*, 1846, app. C, p. 15.

25 Fitzgerald was a native of Ireland and a graduate of the University of Dublin; for a commentary on the characteristic attitudes of such displaced Church of Ireland priests, see T. R. Millman, “Tradition in the Anglican Church of Canada,” in J. W. Grant, ed., *The Churches and the Canadian Experience* (Toronto, 1963), pp. 22-23; for a defence of the Board, see Swabey to the Editor of the *Examiner*, dated 4 February 1857, in *Examiner*, 9 February 1857.

of course was absurd, for the bishop had written his letter *after* the Board, composed of five Protestants and two Roman Catholics, had unanimously decided to exclude the Bible from the list of books for the Norman School. This consideration, and the fact that in October neither he himself nor Stark had officially dissented from the decision of the Board, did not deter Fitzgerald from launching, in conjunction with Protestant clergymen of all denominations, a campaign for the legal establishment of the Bible in the schools. The status of the Bible was at that time based upon a *de facto* policy of the Board, which left the whole question to the local school trustees and parents. But what the Board could give, it could also take away, and this was the root of the fear that gripped Protestant settlements. Could the Board ban the Bible from the district schools as it had from the Normal School? Worried Protestants began to hold "Bible meetings" throughout the colony, and passed resolutions letting the government know exactly where they stood. In spite of the vehemence of the evangelicals, at least one member of the government, William Swabey, an Anglican who was also the senior member of the Board of Education, later confessed himself "totally unable to make any satisfactory analysis, for there were Roman Catholics teaching the Scriptures whilst there were Protestants who did not . . . and more particularly in the district where the greatest excitement has been brought to play . . . they were not in use at all; the most patent fact was that the prayer prescribed by the Board was not in general use by the Presbyterians whilst all others complied."<sup>26</sup>

The wave of indignation came to a crest on the evening of 13 February 1857 with the "Great Protestant Meeting" at Temperance Hall in Charlottetown. The *Islander* newspaper reported that it was "the largest [public meeting] . . . ever convened in this town."<sup>27</sup> Ten clergymen, including five Presbyterians, two Anglicans, one Wesleyan, and one Bible Christian, addressed an overflow audience.<sup>28</sup> That afternoon, before the meeting, the reverend gentlemen met, and rejected overwhelmingly the moderate resolutions of the Rev. Cephas Barker, a Bible Christian. The resolutions which Barker presented would have confined Bible-reading "without note or comment" to the last half-hour of the day, with the minority having the option of retiring; but only one other clergyman, an Anglican, seemed to agree with him.<sup>29</sup> The majority were in a fighting mood, and no half-measures would do. Although the accuracy of the sole verbatim report of the meeting became the

26 Swabey to Daly, 30 June 1858, CO 226/89, pp. 205-06. See Ian Ross Robertson, "William Swabey," *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, X, pp. 669-70.

27 *Islander*, 20 February 1857.

28 This writer has been unable to determine the denominational affiliation of the tenth clergyman, the Rev. John MacKinnon.

29 See Barker's speech of 20 February in Temperance Hall, as reported in *Examiner*, 2 March 1857.



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subject of warm controversy between some of the speakers and the journalist from Whelan's *Examiner* who was present, there was no mistaking the tenor and content of the resolutions which were passed.<sup>30</sup> The meeting thanked Fitzgerald for his vigilance in bringing the bishop's letter under the notice of the public, and resolved to have it printed and distributed. Those present declared that "no education national or otherwise can be good . . . from which the word of God is excluded," and resolved to petition the coming session of the Legislature for "the introduction of the Scriptures into the public schools." The draft petition adopted by the meeting not only demanded that the Bible be included in the list of books used in the Normal School and the district schools, but also that it be introduced on the same basis into the Central Academy, a government grammar school which had opened in Charlottetown in 1836. The statute establishing the Academy, which had its own Board of Trustees and Governors and was beyond the jurisdiction of the Board of Education, included a "no-test" clause; its governors had consistently interpreted this provision as banning the use of the Bible, although in 1845 there had been a brief and futile attempt, inspired by the Auxiliary Bible Society, to force open the doors of the Academy to the Holy Scriptures.<sup>31</sup> In addition, the meeting determined to establish "a Protestant Journal of such a character as shall be worthy of the hearty support of the Protestant population," since "the interests of Protestantism are not adequately regarded by the Public Press of this Island."<sup>32</sup>

The Board of Education reacted quickly to the suggestion that they had excluded the Bible from the district schools. On 25 February they reiterated their permissive policy: "while they have no intention to prohibit the reading of the Bible, but have permitted, and will hereafter permit it, when desired by the parents of children, they feel it their duty, as having charge of the general educational interests of all religious sects, to set their faces steadfastly against any compulsory regulations."<sup>33</sup> This resolution made no mention of the Normal School. In fact, the Bible had not been in use there, but at the same meeting the Board accepted an offer by the master, William Monk, to give one Bible lesson a week, after school hours.<sup>34</sup> The government unwisely took no steps to publicize these decisions of the Board; had it done so, it might have undercut the growing agitation.

30 The report was published in *ibid.*, 23 February 1857. For an account of the dispute, see Ian Ross Robertson, "Religion, Politics, and Education in Prince Edward Island from 1856 to 1877" (unpublished M.A. thesis, McGill University, 1968), Note A, pp. 24-25.

31 See 10 Geo. IV, c. 9, s. 9, and Robertson, "Religion, Politics, and Education in Prince Edward Island from 1856 to 1877," pp. 33-37.

32 *Examiner*, 23 February 1857.

33 Reproduced in PEI, Legislative Council, *Journal*, 1857, p. 46.

34 *Protector and Christian Witness* (Charlottetown), 4 March 1857.

Within weeks of the Great Protestant Meeting, petitions had been signed and a "Protestant Combination" founded. The broad objective of the latter group was the "defense and extension of Protestantism" in opposition to "the encroachments of the Romanists through their Bishop."<sup>35</sup> The president of the Combination was Colonel John Hamilton Gray, a Presbyterian who had been chairman of the Great Protestant Meeting. In early March the new journal demanded by the meeting, the *Protector and Christian Witness*, made its appearance. Its first editorial promised to "oppose any system of priestcraft and superstition." The "Committee of Protestant Gentlemen" who served as editors of the *Protector* appear to have been a sub-group of the Combination. They demanded that the Bible be read every morning upon the opening of school; Monk's meager suggestion for reform of the Normal School system was "a solemn mockery and no mean insult"; the act governing the Central Academy would have to be amended and the Bible specifically authorized.<sup>36</sup> The *Protector* also quickly discovered a martyr: John Stark. On the day following the Great Protestant Meeting, Stark had requested permission to resign, effective 1 May.<sup>37</sup> He had not been present at the meeting, but was lionized by it, and was named in the resolution of gratitude to the alert Fitzgerald. Hence his popularity with the government was at a low ebb. When, less than a week later, he had proceeded to engage in public debate over the Bible question with Whelan's *Examiner*, the government lost patience and dismissed him, effective immediately.<sup>38</sup> The *Protector* attributed his downfall to "his unwillingness to be a partner in succumbing to Romish intrigue."<sup>39</sup>

After the Legislature convened on 26 February, the "Bible petitions" began to flow into the House of Assembly; by the middle of March some 18 had arrived.<sup>40</sup> The Protestant sense of injustice had fed upon the dismissal of Stark and the claims of misquotation by the *Examiner*: a Protestant layman had been dismissed for his love of the Bible by a government whose support was over one-half Catholic, and the Protestant clergy were suffering the indignity of misrepresentation at the hands of a newspaper owned and edited by a Catholic. On 20 March the Bible question came before the Assembly. Coles, Whelan, and James Warburton, the three leading Liberals, maintained that

35 The Rev. George Sutherland, co-secretary (with Fitzgerald) of the Combination, to Joseph Howe, n.d. [April 1857], Joseph Howe Papers, vol. 5, pp. 198-99, PAC.

36 *Protector*, 4 March 1857.

37 PEI, Executive Council Minutes, 19 February 1857, PAPEI microfilm.

38 See *Examiner*, 9 February 1857; Stark to the Editor of *Haszard's Gazette*, dated 17 February 1857, in *Islander*, 20 February 1857; PEI, Executive Council Minutes, 21 February 1857, PAPEI. Stark's salary was to continue until 31 March.

39 *Protector*, 18 March 1857.

40 See PEI, Assembly, *Journal*, 1857, pp. 18-26.

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existing arrangements gave ample latitude to those teachers and trustees who desired Bible-reading in the district schools. The Opposition disagreed. Led by Edward Palmer, they demanded that the Bible be given a legal guarantee of its place in the classroom. Palmer himself declared that “education to be useful and safe to the people, should be based on the christian religion,” and Thomas Heath Haviland Jr. claimed that “secular education without religious instruction does more harm than good.”<sup>41</sup> Haviland’s father moved an amendment to the Free Education Act, proposing that the Holy Scriptures “shall and may be read daily” in the Central Academy, Normal School, and all other public schools where the parents were willing.<sup>42</sup> Coles and Warburton, both Anglicans, argued that the safeguards against abuse under such a provision were inadequate: any non-secular teaching should be confined to the end of the day. Warburton cautioned that “if the compulsory use of the Scriptures in schools be made the law of the land, . . . Catholic children will withdraw from them, and thus nearly one-half of the people of the Island will be deprived of the privilege of having their children educated.” The premier also reminded the Bible enthusiasts that of the 146 schools not using the Scriptures, over one-half were in Protestant districts. For his own part, he would consider it “a blessing in this country if the people obtained a secular education for their children without a religious one.” Whelan warned that adoption of the Haviland amendment in a mixed community would create “a horde of juvenile dogmatists.”<sup>43</sup>

Haviland Sr. recognized that the Bible was now optional in the district schools, but “a Board which makes an order today may rescind it tomorrow.”<sup>44</sup> The problem was that the Liberals chose to interpret any attempt to make the Bible a “class book” as tending towards compulsion.<sup>45</sup> Teachers were expected to use no books other than those on the authorized lists prepared by the Board, and, by implication, to use all those books, although under the permissive “gentleman’s agreement” embodied in the Board resolution of 25 February 1857, the Bible was treated as an exception. Hence the opposition to the legal authorization of the Bible rested upon a dual rationale: satisfaction with the extra-legal *status quo*, and fear of the supposed rigidities involved in giving the Bible a statutory basis in the public schools. The Haviland amendment was defeated by a vote of 12 to eight.<sup>46</sup>

41 PEI, Assembly, *Debates*, 1857, pp. 57-58.

42 PEI, Assembly, *Journal*, 1857, pp. 35-36.

43 PEI, Assembly, *Debates*, 1857, pp. 55, 54, 58, 63. The Bible was being used in 92 schools; the statistics were drawn from Stark’s report of 22 December 1856.

44 *Ibid.*, p. 54.

45 See Swabey in PEI, Legislative Council, *Debates*, 1857, p. 49.

46 PEI, Assembly, *Journal*, 1857, p. 36.

Not all Tories were of the mind of Palmer and the Havilands. Duncan MacLean, the vigorous editor of the *Islander*, agreed with the government: the “shall and may” of the Haviland amendment implied compulsion.<sup>47</sup> MacLean was no friend of clericalism: an “infidel,”<sup>48</sup> he had strongly opposed opening the doors of the Central Academy to the Bible 12 years earlier, when he was a Reform assemblyman. Forced to learn the Bible as a child in Scotland, he had acquired a lasting indifference to it.<sup>49</sup> MacLean had previously tried to avoid involvement in the Bible question, in the hope that the tempest would blow itself out.<sup>50</sup> But now he was in the thick of the fight. The *Protector* in supporting Palmer and the Havilands, warned MacLean to “purge and elevate the tone of your paper, and beware of opposing the interests of Protestantism.”<sup>51</sup> From this time forth, nothing better than an uneasy truce prevailed between the two journals, for neither was disposed to take a backward step.

The first phase of the Bible question was over. The lines were drawn and the protagonists had appeared. On the one side were the Roman Catholic population, the Protestant Liberals, and MacLean. Opposed to them were the evangelical Protestants and the old Tory Party of Palmer and the Havilands. Each side was equally unbending. The Liberals, sure of themselves after the “Bible Debate” in the Assembly, twice refused ratification of a recommendation made by the Board of Education for permissive daily Bible-reading in the Normal School, confined to the opening 20 minutes of the morning.<sup>52</sup> The decisive consideration behind the proposal was the fact that the building had two separate classrooms; the reason given for the disallowance was interference with the hours of secular instruction. This adamant refusal to compromise was surprising, for the suggestion was based upon a committee report signed by the attorney general, Joseph Hensley, who was a Liberal Member of the Legislative Council and an Executive Councillor, and John Rigg, a Roman

47 *Islander*, 27 February 1857.

48 This is an imprecise term, but it is what Islanders of the era called men like MacLean, whether they were atheist, Unitarian, agnostic, or simply apostate. Whelan said that “politics is the religion of Duncan MacLean.”

49 See PEI, Assembly, *Journal*, 1845, p. 41; summary report of Assembly debates in *Royal Gazette* (Charlottetown), 15 April 1845; summary report of Assembly debates in *Islander*, 12 April 1845; summary report of Assembly debates in *Palladium* (Charlottetown), 14 April 1845; letter of MacLean, dated 12 April 1845, in *ibid.*; letter of Thomas Preedy, dated 17 April 1845, in *Islander*, 19 April 1845; letters of MacLean, n.d., in *ibid.*, 18 February, 25 March 1853; and letter of “Deaf Preedy,” dated 25 February 1853, in *Royal Gazette*, 7 March 1853.

50 See editorial in *Islander*, 27 February 1857.

51 *Protector*, 1 April 1857.

52 Since the powers of the Board were extensive, its decisions and resolutions were subject to ratification by the Executive Council, although in practice the veto was rarely used.

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Catholic, as well as Fitzgerald.<sup>53</sup> Furthermore, two members of the Executive Council and two Roman Catholics were among the six Board members who adopted the committee report. This was the last of several opportunities to dampen the issue which were missed by the Coles government or Bishop MacDonald. It is of course impossible to determine whether they would have been ultimately successful had they been sufficiently alert to seize these opportunities. But there can be no doubt that their political insensitivity played into the hands of their adversaries.

The “Biblicans” were as persistent as the government was immovable: “we love peace, but we love the Bible more,” affirmed the *Protector*. They had suffered another foul. The inoffensive Haviland amendment had been misrepresented by the government, with the complicity of the infidel MacLean. The conclusion was inescapable: “Barker, Warburton, Whelan, and others . . . have conspired to rob the lovers of the Bible in this Island of one of our most valued rights.”<sup>54</sup>

On 1 June 1857 the militant Protestants scored what they felt to be their first victory in their campaign to reverse the trend they believed had begun with “the bishop’s letter,” and continued through the dismissal of Stark and the distortions of Coles, Whelan, Warburton, and MacLean. W. W. Lord, the newly-appointed commissioner of crown and public lands, was defeated by a political novice, James C. Pope, when he appealed to his constituents for re-election upon the assumption of office. Although it is disputable just what role, if any, religious and educational issues played within the district, one week after the election Whelan attributed the defeat “almost exclusively to the fanaticism and bigotry which have been aroused against Mr. Lord . . . because he did not support the prayer of the Bible Petition.”<sup>55</sup>

Whatever the reasons for the election of Pope, ultra-Protestants saw no reason in mid-1857 to lower their guard. Although it was now recognized by all that the Scriptures were being used in many district schools, the Normal School allowed only one Bible lesson a week, after school hours, and the Central Academy was still closed to the Bible. On the evening of Sunday, 12 July, the anniversary of the Battle of the Boyne, there occurred an event which seemed highly ominous to militant Protestants: the Rev. Cephas Barker was jostled by a group of Irish Roman Catholics when “street-preaching” in

53 PEI, Executive Council Minutes, 2 April, 7 May 1857, PAPEI.

54 *Protector*, 29 April 1857. Warburton and Barker headed the list of villains because Warburton and some other laymen had recently presented Barker with a Bible in recognition of his work towards denominational harmony. Barker had also annoyed the militants by attempting to ease the tension of the Great Protestant Meeting through injecting a humorous note. See Warburton to Barker, 26 March 1857, and Barker to Warburton, 1 April 1857, both in *Examiner*, 13 April 1857; *ibid.*, 23 February 1857.

55 *Ibid.*, 8 June 1857.

Charlottetown. Despite the intercession of Coles and Lord, Barker was ultimately forced to retreat to the safety of a private residence.<sup>56</sup> In the eyes of the Bible enthusiasts, it was indeed “papal aggression” for a Protestant minister to be harassed while attempting to preach the Gospel. The bitterness of the conflict in the press increased in the late summer when the Free Church Presbytery “In considering the state of the newspaper press of this Colony . . . expressed their highest disapprobation of the immoral and infidel tendency of much that is published in the *Islander* and *Examiner* newspapers, and resolved to recommend to their people to withdraw immediately all support from these papers and avail themselves of the valuable information weekly disseminated through the pages of the *Protector*.”<sup>57</sup> Shortly afterwards, new “dangers to Protestantism” were perceived. In September the Roman Catholic bishops of the Maritime colonies, sitting in Halifax, issued a Synodical Letter which stigmatized the Protestant Bible as “a studied corruption of texts.”<sup>58</sup> In October Bishop MacDonald founded Notre Dame Convent, a school for girls, in Charlottetown; the Convent provided the *Protector* with a convenient object for its abuse for several months.

In early 1858 the evangelical Protestants prepared for the final session of the 20th General Assembly of Prince Edward Island. On 27 January the Protestant Combination published a list of “Questions to be put to Candidates for seats in the Ensuing General Assembly of this Island.” MacLean, upon seeing the list, thought they “would be very proper if the election were held, not for the choice of a secular Candidate, but of a Protestant Clergyman.”<sup>59</sup> He was close to the truth, since the four questions required, as well as support for the Bible and resistance to grants to Roman Catholic institutions, acknowledgement of “the necessity of the great Reformation from Popery in the sixteenth century, . . . of the existence of a widespread combination of Popish agents for the resubjugation of the British Empire to the priestly domination of Rome, . . . [and resistance to] all Romish aggressions on the rights of others.”<sup>60</sup> On 19 February another “Great Protestant Meeting” was held in Charlottetown at Temperance Hall. Two of the unanimously-passed resolutions are worthy of special notice: “That the present state of the Academy is not suited to the wants of this Island, and that a College established on

56 For accounts of the incident, see *ibid.*, 13 July 1857; and *Protector*, 15 July 1857.

57 Minutes of the Free Church Presbytery of PEI, 25 August 1857, Archives of Pine Hill Divinity Hall, Halifax [APH]. Access to the collections at Pine Hill was granted by the archivist, the Rev. E. Arthur Betts.

58 The second and fifth resolutions passed by the Great Protestant Meeting of 1858, and the speech of the Rev. Thomas Duncan on that occasion, in *Protector*, 24 February 1858, refer to the Synodical Letter in question.

59 *Islander*, 5 March 1858.

60 *Protector*, 27 January 1858. Whelan called the questions “The New Politico-Religious Catechism”; see *Examiner*, 8 February 1858.

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proper principles would be welcomed by the people” and “That this meeting pledges itself to use its utmost influence to return sound Protestant and Bible-loving men at the ensuing General Election.”<sup>61</sup> Less than a week later, the Kirk Presbytery called on the government “to render Bible instruction imperative in the higher Seminaries where teachers are prepared to become efficient instructors in the Common Schools.”<sup>62</sup>

When, one month after the second Great Protestant Meeting, the House of Assembly considered a new spate of Bible petitions, the effect of the continued agitation was obvious: twice the government, before an almost-full House, defeated the Palmer-Haviland group by only one vote. In the committee-of-the-whole, the casting vote of chairman William McGill was required, and on the floor of the House Speaker Edward Thornton had to break the tie. Two Liberals, Donald Munro and Joseph Wightman, and one semi-independent Liberal, Alexander Laird Sr., all Protestants, voted with Palmer and the Havilands. In fact, the Opposition had come within a hair of passing Haviland Sr.’s resolution, which proposed a legal guarantee for the use of the Bible in the Normal School and the Academy. Coles had had to delay the division by filibustering until Joseph Dingwell, a Protestant Liberal, finally appeared, “more dead than alive.”<sup>63</sup> Had he not arrived, McGill and Thornton could never have cast their deciding votes from the chair. The Bible Debate of 1858 had been more heated than that of the previous year, for the “Biblicans” believed that the tide was beginning to run in their favour. The government, by affixing a lengthy declarative preamble to the resolution denying the prayer of the petitioners, thought they were bringing about “the final disposition of the question, in such a way as will effectually discourage the overzealous, in future, from getting up such an agitation.”<sup>64</sup> This was wishful thinking. To the ultras, the 12-to-11 votes simply meant that Protestantism had been cheated again. The issue was still open: although in practice the question of Bible-reading had been narrowed down to the Academy and the Normal School, the Scriptures still lacked a statutory basis in the schools throughout the Island.

The intensity of feeling increased when Father Angus MacDonald requested an endowment for Saint Dunstan’s College, of which he was rector. The college, just outside Charlottetown, had been opened by Bishop MacDonald on 17 January 1855, and “Father Angus” had become its first rector at the age of 24. The number of pupils had varied between 18 and 35, and most appear to have been preparing for lay occupations. Protestants could be admitted, and were under no obligation to attend religious services.

61 *Protector*, 24 February 1858.

62 Minutes of the Kirk Presbytery of PEI, 24 February 1858, APH.

63 *Monitor*, 26 March 1858; also see *Examiner*, 22 March 1858.

64 See PEI, Assembly, *Journal*, 1858, pp. 48-49; Coles in PEI, Assembly, *Debates*, 1858, p. 79.

Three days after the Bible Debate, the Assembly, by a vote of 15 to three, decided to give Saint Dunstan's a one-year grant, although not to endow it.<sup>65</sup> The amount agreed upon was 75 pounds, which was to be spent for the purchase of apparatus, maps, and books.<sup>66</sup> This did not please the Protestants of the Island, and in fact two counter-petitions were unanimously refused consideration by the House because they contained "language reflecting offensively, on the religious principles of a large proportion of the inhabitants of this Island."<sup>67</sup>

At the election of 24 June 1858, the Tories contrasted the willingness to aid Saint Dunstan's College with the refusal to legalize the Bible in the district schools, the alleged absence of the Scriptures from the Normal School, and the "godlessness" of the Central Academy. Since June 1854, when the Liberals had been elected by a margin of 18 to six, the House had been enlarged to 30 seats. The Coles government was sustained by a mere 16-to-14 margin. Of course there were at stake issues other than those centering on religion and education. The Liberals had been in power for seven years and had not solved the land question. Leasehold tenure still prevailed, and the electorate was frustrated. Furthermore, the Conservatives had succeeded in convincing many voters that the Liberal legislators were corrupted by "office-holding." The Tories advocated a return to the "good old days" when such public officials as the colonial secretary and the colonial treasurer were not elected politicians. Then, supposedly, political considerations would not distract civil servants from the performance of their duties, and politics itself would be purified. Men would enter public life with the ideal of service, and not by reason of hunger for the emoluments of office. This doctrine was called "non-departmentalism" and in a sense implied permanence of tenure. Its champions were the *Islander*, the *Monitor*, and the "Political Alliance," a group of Tories led by men not seeking elective office, and hence eligible for appointment.<sup>68</sup> But the prime reason for the Liberals' decline in popularity was the Bible question. Well before polling day, the *Protector* had sounded the tocsin: "Let the only question be between Protestantism and Romanism."<sup>69</sup>

65 PEI, Assembly, *Journal*, 1858, p. 40. After Bishop MacEachern had opened St. Andrew's College, 15 miles east of Charlottetown, in 1831, the Assembly had given him an annual grant, varying between 50 and 75 pounds, which was continued until the college closed in 1845, although the bishop made no secret that its purpose was to give young Roman Catholic Islanders preliminary training for the priesthood.

66 *Ibid.*, p. 76. The vote for this item of supply was 12 to nine.

67 *Ibid.*, p. 35.

68 The "General Declaration" and Constitution of the Political Alliance are enclosed in Daly to E. B. Lytton, 30 March 1859, CO 226/90, p. 104. On the genesis, growth, and eventual death of the idea of "non-departmentalism," see D. C. Harvey, "Dishing the Reformers," *Transactions of the Royal Society of Canada*, 3rd ser., vol. XXV, sect. II (1931), pp. 37-44.

69 *Protector*, 4 May 1858.



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On the Sunday before 24 June several Protestant ministers expressed their disapproval of the Coles government.<sup>70</sup> The result was that on election day the Protestant Liberals in particular paid dearly for their refusal to join in the crusade for the Bible in the schools. After 24 June the life of the Coles government hung by a thread — two seats in the Assembly.

The pressure on the government did not abate. When the Executive Council dismissed Peter DesBrisay, the assistant to the post master general, for voting against them on 24 June, and when Thomas Owen Sr., his superior, refused to accept the new appointee, the government felt obliged to dismiss Owen also.<sup>71</sup> Public reaction was immediate and hostile. Owen was a competent official, and his replacement by Benjamin Davies, a defeated Liberal candidate, was cited as evidence of the need for “non-departmentalism” in order to remove political influence as a factor in the choice of public officers. Religious considerations were also dragged into the controversy, as the incoming assistant was the son of a newly-elected Roman Catholic assemblyman, Francis Kelly. Forgotten in the attacks upon the government were Owen’s lifelong Toryism, his son Thomas Owen Jr.’s election as a new Tory assemblyman, and the fact that he alone of the major officials of the period before responsible government had been left in office through the 1850s. Lieutenant-governor Sir Dominick Daly believed the Executive Council to have been very patient with Owen Sr., whom he thought had provoked the government, believing himself to be irreplaceable. Daly had warned Owen of the possible consequences of his intransigence, but he had acted under “the influence of pretended friends, who sought thus to embarrass the Government.”<sup>72</sup> In any event, when the Tories held a “Queens County Indignation Meeting” in Charlottetown on 25 August, a riot nearly resulted, as Irish Catholics and Scottish Presbyterians came in large numbers, each to uphold vehemently the one side or the other.<sup>73</sup> The Conservatives were less successful when they attempted, in September and October, to make a political issue of the replacement of John MacNeill by R. B. Irving as school visitor. The new appointment simply meant that MacNeill, who had been acting school visitor since the dismissal of Stark, would be able to return to his regular duties as Chief Clerk of the Assembly and Secretary to the Board of Education.<sup>74</sup>

70 See Swabey to Daly, 30 June 1858, CO 226/89, p. 213.

71 PEI, Executive Council Minutes, 28 July, 2 August 1858, PAPEI.

72 Daly to Lytton, confidential, 12 November 1858, CO 226/89, p. 364; also see Daly to Lytton, 7 August 1858, *ibid.*, p. 291.

73 See *Examiner*, 16, 23, 30 August, 6, 13, 27 September 1858; *Islander*, 27 August, 10 September 1858; *Monitor*, 24, 31 August 1858. Also see “Donnybrook Redivivum,” a poem in John Lepage, *The Island Minstrel* (Charlottetown, 1860), pp. 204-7.

74 See *Islander*, 24 September 1858; *Monitor*, 12 October 1858; *Examiner*, 25 October 1858.

The continuing pressure and the close results of the recent election forced the Liberals to re-assess their policy on the Bible question. On 7 September the Coles government reversed its decision of April 1857 concerning use of the Bible in the Normal School. The Council authorized Bible-reading every morning upon opening the institution, “without note or comment — by those children whose parents desire the same.”<sup>75</sup> At least at one level, this was a complete capitulation, since the policy had previously been to allow Bible-reading on Fridays only, and after class. In fact, Monk, in a letter which suggested changes in this regard, had only recommended that the Scriptures be read three mornings a week. He had written the letter at the request of several parents of students at the Normal School, and he had pointed out that the children of non-consenting parents could go into the second room of the building. Although the letter was dated 24 March 1858, five days after the Bible Debate of 1858, the Board apparently did not submit it to the Council until September, when it also re-submitted its rejected resolution of April 1857. Soon after receiving a favourable response from the government, the Board of Education adopted the “without note or comment” proviso as a formal regulation for the Normal School.<sup>76</sup> The Executive Council was unsure whether the Bible should be read “for” or “by” the students, but by January 1859 decided that either was acceptable.<sup>77</sup> In spite of this concession, when the Assembly met in February there was no peace for the government. John Ramsay, a new Liberal Member, declared himself conscientiously unable to take the oath of office. Upon reflection, he had decided that he did not possess the 50 pounds freehold *or* leasehold which was necessary to sit as a Member; both the *Examiner* and the *Islander* came to credit Ramsay with sincerity in this matter.<sup>78</sup> As a result of his withdrawal, the government majority was reduced to 15-to-14. Complete deadlock ensued when each side refused to choose a speaker from its own ranks. The session lasted three days, and simply provided a forum for recriminations concerning the dismissal of Owen and DesBrisay, and the extent of clerical influence at the election of 1858.<sup>79</sup> Finally, being unable to sustain a majority in the House, Coles asked for and received a dissolution.<sup>80</sup> The angry Tories, who had hoped to be given

75 PEI, Executive Council Minutes, 7 September 1858, PAPEI.

76 *Ibid.*, 7 December 1858.

77 *Ibid.*, 7 September, 7 December 1858, 4 January 1859.

78 See 19 Vic., c. 21, s. 75; *Examiner*, 21 February 1859; *Islander*, 18 March 1859.

79 The most complete and reliable account of the three-day session is in *Monitor*, 22 February, 1 March 1859.

80 PEI, Executive Council Minutes, 19 February 1859, PAPEI; PEI, Assembly, *Journal*, 1859, 1st session, p. 8.

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an opportunity to form a new government, called the dissolution “the finishing stroke to the black catalogue of their misdeeds.”<sup>81</sup>

At the election of 19 March 1859 the issues were much the same as they had been nine months earlier; but now the Conservatives had momentum and were closing in for the kill. The Liberals, dispirited by their unexpected reverse in the Assembly a month earlier, fielded only 23 candidates.<sup>82</sup> Although in early February the *Protector* had died owing to lack of support (which in turn was traceable to its extremism and its lack of first-rate editorial talent), the Bible question remained, for the Scriptures were neither in the Academy nor legalized in the district schools. The concession of 7 September 1858 concerning the Normal School was too little and had come too late to pacify militant Protestants. They did not trust the Coles government on the Bible question: it had waited too long to act, and its attitude was too reticent. Furthermore, had not the Roman Catholic thirst for office cost two competent, Protestant public servants their jobs? In vain, Whelan attempted to silence the cry of “Catholic domination” by pointing out that there were only seven Catholics in the 30-man Assembly, and only three among the 18 leading public officials.<sup>83</sup> On polling day, the Conservatives gained an 18-to-12 triumph, in which even Warburton was defeated. When Palmer formed his government, he was true to the “non-departmental” creed of the Political Alliance: the main officers, albeit political friends of the administration, were not members of either branch of the Legislature.

Although the new government swept Liberals out of office throughout the colony, and immediately put their “non-departmental” principles into practice, they made haste slowly on the Bible question. During the session of April and May 1859 they passed no legislation relating to religious training in the Central Academy, the Normal School, or the district schools. Had they desired to push through such measures with a minimum of resistance, it would have been an opportune time, for the Liberals, after eight years in office, and deprived of the services of Warburton, a veteran of 12 sessions, were demoralized. Only Coles could be expected to offer effective opposition to government proposals, as Whelan was frequently absent. Perhaps the Tories themselves preferred to legislate upon such a sensitive topic in calmer times, for they contented themselves with dismissing Monk and the current school visitor, Irving. The latter had reported that no dissatisfaction existed

81 *Monitor*, 22 February 1859. Daly's granting of a dissolution was criticized by the *Monitor* and the *Islander* (4 March). There was certainly precedent in the recent history of the Island for a lieutenant-governor refusing the advice of his council on the matter of a dissolution; see E. C. Moulton and Ian Ross Robertson, “Sir Alexander Bannerman,” *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, IX (forthcoming).

82 *Monitor*, 15 March 1859.

83 *Examiner*, 22 November 1858.

in the common school districts concerning arrangements for Bible-reading. Without mentioning Saint Dunstan's College by name, he had also endorsed the principle of limited public assistance to denominational colleges. In addition, both men appear to have furnished their detractors with a weapon by intemperate use of alcohol. This was certainly the case with "RBI", who occasionally appeared in court on charges of being drunken and disorderly, a fact which had led to vigorous protests at the time of his appointment; and intemperance may have been what Stark had in mind when he wrote in 1857 that Monk's "public and private conduct since coming here, has given me the keenest and bitterest disappointment of my career in this Colony."<sup>84</sup> In any event, the government, although relieving Monk and Irving of their offices, also refunded the six pounds, 12 shillings, and nine pence in duties, which had been levied on the instruments and books purchased by Saint Dunstan's College with its 75-pound grant from 1858.<sup>85</sup>

The militant Protestants, however, had no intention of fading quietly from the public view. On 5 July 1859 a new political-religious journal, the *Protestant and Evangelical Witness*, was founded by David Laird, a recent graduate in theology from the Presbyterian theological seminary in Truro, N.S., and the second son of Alexander Laird Sr., a member of the Palmer cabinet.<sup>86</sup> Strongly supported by the Presbyteries of the Island,<sup>87</sup> the new paper assured that the Bible issue would not be forgotten. Its opening editorial promised "to give considerable space to articles . . . exposing the errors and noting the wiles and workings of popery."<sup>88</sup> The outlook seemed bleak for the Roman Catholics of the Island. They were in the minority, and lines of religious division had hardened and become political: all but two of the Protestant Liberal candidates at the election of 1859 had been forced to seek mandates from Catholic constituencies, or, like Warburton, be defeated. Certainly, no Catholic would think of contesting a Protestant district. As for the Conservatives, they formed an entirely-Protestant government, and, of their supporters in the Assembly, only two represented constitu-

84 PEI, Executive Council Minutes, 18 April, 9, 24 May, 21 June 1859, PAPEI; PEI, Assembly, *Journal*, 1859, app. O, 5th and 7th pages; *Haszard's Gazette* (Charlottetown), 19 March 1856; *Islander*, 24 September 1858; letter of Stark in *Protector*, 15 April 1857; PEI, Executive Council Minutes, 19 February 1857, PAPEI; A. B. MacKenzie in PEI, Legislative Council, *Debates*, 1879, 2nd session, p. 152.

85 PEI, Assembly, *Journal*, 1859, 2nd session, p. 59.

86 See Frank MacKinnon, "David Laird of Prince Edward Island," *Dalhousie Review*, XXVI (1947), pp. 405-21. Laird was never ordained.

87 See, for example, Minutes of the Secession Presbytery of PEI, 19 July 1859, APH; the letter of the Rev. George Sutherland, dated 28 March 1865, in *Protestant and Evangelical Witness* (Charlottetown), 1 April 1865.

88 Editorial in *ibid.*, 5 July 1859.

encies with Catholic majorities. Prince Edward Island society was becoming two separate societies, and in the late 1850s this was symbolized by the rise of the Young Men's Christian Association and the Catholic Young Men's Literary Institute, and the corresponding decline of the "mixed" Mechanics' Institute.

If the new government presented a dark picture to Island Catholics, educational developments were equally discouraging: in the latter part of July, Palmer appointed the Rev. Thomas Duncan and the Rev. George Sutherland to the Board of Education.<sup>89</sup> The two new clergymen displaced Liberal MPPs William Swabey and Francis Kelly, whose removal cleared the Board of politicians, and left the Protestant clergy in a voting majority on the seven-man body. The other two ministers on the Board were Fitzgerald and the Rev. Robert S. Patterson; each of the four had been present at the Great Protestant Meeting of 1858, and their views on the Bible question were known to be extreme. Sutherland in particular was a controversial figure, and in 1857 had polemicized with MacLean and Whelan concerning his part in the "Free Kirk Resolution" respecting the *Islander*, *Examiner*, and *Protector* newspapers. In addition, the new school visitor, John Arbuckle Sr., though baptized by Bishop MacEachern, was familiar throughout the Island as a lecturer for the Sons of Temperance, and the growing Orange Association.<sup>90</sup>

When the "Bible Clause" was finally introduced into the Education Act in early 1860, its moderation surprised many Catholics and Protestants alike:

The introduction of the Bible, to be read in the Central Academy, and in all the public schools of this Island, of every grade, receiving support from the public Treasury, is hereby authorized, and the Teachers are hereby required to open the school on each school-day, with the reading of the sacred Scriptures by those children whose parents or guardians desire it, without comment, explanation, or remark thereupon by the Teachers; but no children shall be required to attend during such reading aforesaid, unless desired by their parents or guardians.<sup>91</sup>

Although the reading was to be done within regular hours, the safeguards to conscience were adequate, for the teacher was not required to read anything in which he might not believe, and no child would be compelled to attend. Presumably, the reading could be dispensed with entirely, wherever the parents did not insist, and even on days when the children of the insisting parents did not come to school. The government had been under pressure

89 PEI, Executive Council Minutes, 23 July 1859, PAPEI.

90 See Patrick Walker in summary report of Legislative Council debates in *Examiner*, 25 May 1863; for an account of the early history of Orangeism in PEI, see Robertson, "Religion, Politics, and Education in Prince Edward Island from 1856 to 1877," Note A, pp. 92-93.

91 From *Protestant*, 5 May 1860.

from the new Board to act vigorously in the field of education and to bring the Acadian districts under the same regulations as the rest of the Island.<sup>92</sup> One week after the commencement of the session, the Board had sent a strongly-worded letter to the Legislature:

Instruction and training in morality, being an essential, and the highest part of Education; and the Bible — God's revealed will to man, irrespective of nation or language, — being the only infallible standard of morality, it is necessary and proper that all the youth of our land attending all our public schools, of every grade, should have their minds moulded and regulated by its sacred teachings, — therefore the Board recommend that the introduction of the Bible into all our public schools, of every grade and class receiving support from the Public Treasury, be authorized; and that the teachers be required to devote one half hour of the former part of each school day to moral training from the Bible — no sectarian teaching being allowed; and the teacher's remarks to be simply explanatory and practical; the children of Roman Catholics to be allowed to use their own version, when preferred; and no child being compelled to receive these instructions, whose parents or guardians may object to the same.<sup>93</sup>

The differences between the latter scheme and the law as enacted were subtle but real: under the Board's plan, the teacher would be required to lead the Bible-reading, and devote a prescribed amount of time to it each day. Although disclaiming sectarianism and compulsion, the Board would permit remarks on the text of the Bible, thus leaving the decision as to what was sectarian to the teacher, and would place the responsibility for dissenting, or speaking out first, on those who did not desire Bible-reading. In other words, the new law put inertia, a powerful force in the rural districts of Prince Edward Island, on the side of those who did not desire Bible-reading in the schools, since the "Bible Clause" implied that those who wished to read the Scriptures had first to express their desire to do so. The Board would have done the reverse, and thus have established Bible-reading as the norm, which could only be prevented by mass, indeed total, dissent.

In keeping with their approach in the "Bible Clause," the government did not attempt to change the *status quo* in the remainder of the Island's educational system: the Normal School and the Acadian schools were left as they were. Moreover, the establishment of the Bible in the Central Academy was a dead letter, for the Academy itself was abolished at the end of June 1860,

92 For the special arrangements prevailing in Acadian districts, see Robertson, "Religion, Politics, and Education in Prince Edward Island from 1856 to 1877," p. 66 and Note F, pp. 161-62.

93 PEI, Assembly, *Journal*, 1860, app. J, 3rd page, MacNeill (Secretary to the Board) to the Legislature, 23 February 1860.

and no provision was made for religious instruction of any kind in its successor, the new Prince of Wales College.<sup>94</sup> “We think they have been overcautious,” remarked the *Protestant*.<sup>95</sup> But most Islanders, both Protestant and Roman Catholic, were relieved: it was a face-saving settlement, which gave the Protestants the satisfaction of knowing that they could claim the legal right to have the Scriptures read in the classroom, yet guarded against controversial interpretations and commentaries, thus keeping the Catholics in the public schools. The issue was buried.

Hence the Bible question, which had raged for more than three years and led directly to the fall of the Liberal government of Coles and Whelan, ended when Palmer gave existing arrangements the force of law. In practice, the only difference between the situation in 1860 and that in 1856 was that students in the Normal School were allowed to read their Bibles, if they so wished. The social and political by-products of the Bible question were as momentous as the change in the actual use of the Bible was trivial: by the end of 1859 the *Islander* (after MacLean’s death in April edited by another “infidel,” William Henry Pope) could accurately state that “the two parties into which the people of this Island now are, and for some time to come will continue to be divided — [are] a Protestant and a Roman Catholic party.”<sup>96</sup> The class and ideological divisions consequent upon the land question had been replaced by sectarian animosity as the moving force in Island politics. In addition, of course, the old Tory Party of pre-responsible government days — that collection of social and propertied interests known as the “family compact” — had been restored to power. The cabinet of Palmer, himself a proprietor and land agent, reflected this fact: as well as Colonel Gray, the president of the Protestant Combination and chairman of the Great Protestant Meetings of 1857 and 1858, it included James Pope, a prominent shipbuilder and proprietor, John Longworth, scion of a landholding family, James Yeo Sr., perhaps the colony’s most powerful merchant and shipbuilder and reputedly its richest resident, and T. Heath Haviland Jr., whose father had been the very personification of the old regime.<sup>97</sup> The leading office holders were Owen, William Pope, James’ brother, Francis Longworth Jr., John’s brother, John Ings, publisher of the *Islander* and Yeo’s son-in-law, Frederick Brecken, a relative of the Havilands, and George Wright, a prominent official

94 See Robertson, “Religion, Politics, and Education in Prince Edward Island from 1856 to 1877,” pp. 73-74.

95 *Protestant*, 5 May 1860.

96 *Islander*, 30 December 1859. See Ian Ross Robertson, “William Henry Pope,” *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, X, p. 594.

97 See Ian Ross Robertson, “Thomas Heath Haviland Sr.,” *ibid.*, IX (forthcoming). By this time mayor of Charlottetown and president of the Bank of Prince Edward Island, the father did not contest the elections of 1858 and 1859.

in the years before 1851. Among the Tory rank-and-file in the Assembly were William Douse, long-time land agent for the extensive Selkirk Estate, John Yeo, son of James Sr., and Thomas Owen Jr. A few months after the Palmer cabinet assumed office, William Pope wrote that, under the new administration, “the rights of property — sacred in all civilized countries — will be inviolably preserved. Under the late Government property was insecure.”<sup>98</sup> Given that little change was made in the practical role of the Bible in the schools, there is reason to suspect that restoration of the old régime had been the real point to the Bible question — at least for much of the Tory leadership who had adopted the cause, if not for the Protestant clergy and the mass of Protestant voters in the countryside. The Liberals, heavily and visibly dependent for political support upon the impoverished Roman Catholic minority, who were largely tenants, had proven vulnerable to an appeal along sectarian lines. Such were the fruits of the Bible question.

As well as being important in itself and for its immediate consequences, the Bible question deserves to be remembered as the opening chapter in the history of an enduring source of contention among Islanders. Although the controversy over the role of the Bible in the public schools came to an end in 1860, the bitterness and distrust engendered by it did not disappear so easily. In one form or another, the issues surrounding religion and education continued to dominate the public life of Prince Edward Island until the late 1870s. Not until the election of 1876 and the Public Schools Act of the following year did Islanders settle upon the exact nature of the relationship between church and state with regard to education in their province.<sup>99</sup>

In a wider context, the Bible question in Prince Edward Island can be seen as simply a local variant of a problem which was common throughout English-speaking British North America: how to adjust a system of universal public education to the needs of religiously-mixed communities. Tensions were usually acute as the solutions were worked out, and it was to be expected that they would be doubly so in a colony so evenly divided in religion as was the Island. Fundamental principles had to be established, and the “Bible Clause” of 1860 was a step in that direction. Controversies over public aid to sectarian institutions — the usual form which these tensions assumed in British North America — would come later to Prince Edward Island.

98 *Islander*, 29 July 1859.

99 The opposing parties in 1876 were known as the “Denominationalists” and the “Free Schoolers,” and were led by James Pope and Louis Henry Davies; the latter, who was the son of Benjamin Davies and who later became Chief Justice of Canada, led the Free Schoolers to victory.