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ALL CHANGE BUT NO CHANGE: CAN WE LEARN THE LESSONS FROM THE PAST?

Rev Brian Kennaway
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Rev Brian Kennaway

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IBIS is grateful to the Department of the Taoiseach for its support in funding the conference.
Rev Brian Kennaway was brought up in North Belfast. After a time in industry he attended Magee University College Londonderry and Trinity College Dublin where he graduated in 1972. He attended Union Theological College Belfast and was ordained into the Ministry of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland, in 1976.

He served as Assistant Minister in Glengormley Presbyterian Church in North Belfast before becoming Minister of Crumlin Presbyterian Church, County Antrim, in 1977. He retired from Crumlin Presbyterian Church in January 2009. He is still active in the wider Church serving on a number of boards and committees of the General Assembly.

Brian has served on the Irish Government’s Inter-Departmental Committee, for the development of the Boyne Site, and was a regular contributor at the Police College of the RUC/PSNI. He has been an active member of the Council of The Irish Association, whose aims and objectives he enthusiastically endorses. He was appointed President of the association on 9 May 2009.
INTRODUCTION

When it was first suggested to me that I should present a paper on the “reception of history today in Orangeism and Unionism”, I immediately thought that I had drawn the short straw! Surely, I thought, NOTHING changes in Orangeism and Unionism—even the reception of history. Therein lies the dilemma. The subject could be addressed by the now four famous words—“never, never, never, never.” But that would not be an adequate response—for as we know events have moved on at an enormous rate.

This paper looks at the broad history of Orangeism and Unionism from the beginning of the Orange tradition at the end of the seventeenth century, to the present issues facing us today—at the beginning of the twenty-first century.

I look at some of the major events in this period to see how they were understood then and how they are received now.

THE FORMATION OF THE ORANGE TRADITION

When William and Mary responded to the invitation to accept the throne of England and arrived at Torbay on 5 November 1688, the Orange tradition was born.

It has long been popularly understood that William saved us, not only from “Popery, brass money and wooden shoes”, but also established civil and religious liberty in these islands. Geoffrey Wheatcroft once wrote:

The best principles of the Glorious Revolution haven’t always been on display in Northern Ireland. But William the Deliverer was a true hero, and ‘the ould Boyne water’ a famous victory. You don’t need a sash or a Lambeg drum to drink the Orange toast, to ‘Civil and Religious liberty’.

Martin Mansergh recognised the contribution of “....aspects of the philosophy of the ‘Glorious Revolution’ of 1689 which led eventually towards democracy and government by consent, even if the practice in Ireland was for a long while totally deplorable”.

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1 The London Times 12 July 2000
2 Martin Mansergh, The Legacy of History P.148

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He might have added that the practice in Britain was not far behind.

How are these events understood today? The fickleness of human nature means that, in the words of the Simon and Garfunkel song "...the man hears what he wants to hear and disregards the rest."3 We are all—Catholic/Protestant, Nationalist/Unionist—guilty of selective history.

The Orange constituency still understand these events in the words of the Address:

Brother you have been initiated into the Orange Institution and we now proceed to give you a little of the history of our noble order and its workings. Orange associations were formed in England in 1688 to advance the interests of William the 3rd Prince of Orange. In whose name we associate, whose memory we cherish and who on the 1st July 1690 on the banks of the Boyne defeated the combined forces of Popery and tyranny in this country.4

This of course is a very selective view of history and assumes that full “civil and religious liberty” for all was established by William following the Battle of the Boyne. Leaving the scandal of the Treaty of Limerick to the side, how does that explain the exodus of 250,000 Presbyterians from Ireland in the century following the battle? If it was not famine which drove them out it was freedom. William’s achievements were noble however, they were but the beginning. They laid the foundations upon which others built.

THE EARLY YEARS OF THE INSTITUTION

When the Grand Orange Lodge of Ireland first met in Dublin on 9 April 1798, the task of drawing up Rules and Regulations was addressed. When the meeting was reconvened on 20 November 1798, the original hand-written minutes contain "Qualifications requisite for an Orangeman", which read as follows:

He should have a sincere love and veneration for his Almighty Maker, productive of those happy fruits, righteousness and obedience to His commands; a firm and steady faith in the Saviour of the world, convinced that He is the only Mediator between a sinful creature and an offended Creator. Without these he can be no Christian—of a humane and compassionate disposition, and a courteous and affable behaviour. He should be an utter enemy to savage brutality and unchristian cruelty; a lover of society and improving company; and have a laudable regard for the Protestant religion, and sincere regard to propagate its precepts; zealous in promoting the honour of his King and country; heartily desirous of victory and success in those pursuits, yet convinced and assured that God alone can grant them; he should have a hatred to cursing and swearing, and taking the name of God in vain (a shameful practice); and he should use all opportunities of discouraging it among his brethren.

3 Simon and Garfunkel, The Boxer
4 Orange Address given following initiation
Wisdom and prudence should guide his actions; honesty and integrity direct his conduct; and honour and glory be the motives of his endeavours. Lastly he should pay the strictest attention to a religious observance of the Sabbath, and also of temperance and sobriety.\footnote{6}

The founding fathers of the Orange Institution, who drew up these qualifications, make no reference to Roman Catholics either as individuals or as a Church. These original qualifications are not received as history today because they were unknown—at least until I published them. The Grand Chaplain of the Grand Orange Lodge of Ireland, Rev Canon SE Long some years ago declared his lack of knowledge of such qualifications. I never heard any reference to them in my forty plus years of membership.

Dr Patrick Duigenan (1735-1816) was the second Grand Secretary of the Grand Orange Lodge of Ireland. He was elected to office in succession to John Claudius Beresford on Sunday 12 July 1801. The Orange historian, RM Sibbett, describes him as “a prominent Orangeman,...a remarkable man”, and “a fluent writer, and an eloquent speaker.” Henry Grattan considered that Duigenan’s speeches inflicted a double injury: “the Catholics suffering from his attack and the Protestants from his defence.” Patrick Duigenan married a practicing Roman Catholic and, according to Kevin Haddick-Flynn, permitted her to have an in-house chaplain. This fact neither reduced his commitment to Orange principles, nor did it decrease his prominence within the Orange Institution of his day.

Like the early qualifications, Duigenan’s marriage to a practicing Catholic was not the subject of much pamphleteering in recent years in Orange circles. These were not the subjects addressed in the Orange Standard! Like so many early events in Orangeism there is a selective history.

**MAJOR EVENTS IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY**

The first major challenge to face the Orange Institution in the nineteenth century was the Act of Union, an Act which divided the fledging organisation. Many of the aristocratic Brethren held seats in the Irish Parliament yet this did not prevent the Grand Lodge on 4 December 1798, when Legislative Union was first mooted, advising those under its jurisdiction, strictly to abstain from expressing any opinion pro or con upon the question of a Legislative Union between this country and Great Britain, because that such expression of opinion, and such discussion in Lodges could only lead to disunion; that disunion might lead to disruption; and the disruption of the Society in the existing crisis would but promote the designs of the disaffected, and, in all human probability, lead to the dismemberment of the Empire.\footnote{6}

\footnote{6 Grand Lodge of Ireland Minute Book: pp.45-46} \footnote{6 Grand Lodge of Ireland Minute Book: p.55}
Had this lesson been learned the Institution could have avoided much of the division and bitterness over the Belfast Agreement two hundred years later.

Thomas Verner, the Grand Master of Ireland, representing the Northern gentry, favoured the Act of Union, while John Claudius Beresford, the Grand Secretary was opposed to it. Irish Protestants in 1800 tended to see their parliament as a protection of their position—an attitude which was to be repeated a century later!

Three Dublin Lodges demanded that a Grand Lodge be elected which would "support the independence of Ireland and the Constitution of 1782." Accordingly, Sunday on 12 July 1801, George Ogle was elected Grand Master, by 14 votes to 12, in opposition to Thomas Verner, a position he held until his death on 10 August 1814. Patrick Duigenan was elected to the office of Grand Secretary at the same meeting.

The Institution, following the resurrection of the Grand Lodge in 1828, accepted the qualifications of 1830. The “Qualifications” recorded in the "Laws and Ordinances of the Orange Institution of Ireland" in 1830 read:

An Orangeman should have a sincere love and veneration for his Almighty Maker, a firm and steadfast faith in the Saviour of the world, convinced that he is the only Mediator between a sinful creature and an offended Creator. His disposition should be humane and compassionate; his behaviour kind and courteous. He should love rational and improving society, faithfully regard the Protestant religion, and sincerely desire to propagate its doctrines and precepts. He should have a hatred to cursing and swearing, and taking the name of God in vain; and he should use all opportunities of discouraging those shameful practices. Wisdom and prudence should guide his actions; temperance and sobriety, honesty and integrity direct his conduct; and the honor and glory of his King and Country, should be the motives of his exertions.7

Again there is no reference to Roman Catholics. This is significant considering that the Catholic Emancipation Act had been passed the previous year.

Catholic Emancipation caused genuine concern among Protestants and Orangemen. The genuine fear, in the mid-nineteenth century, was that Roman Catholics would return Roman Catholic Members of Parliament, who would unbalance the "Constitutional Settlement." The Orangemen of Dublin took this matter seriously, as is evidenced by a “Bottle Riot” at the Theatre Royal in Dublin.

The Orange Institution, in the middle of the nineteenth century, came out in opposition to the disestablishment of the Church of Ireland. There was the fear that this would have some effect on the question of legislative union. This may appear rather strange, since fifty years previously at least half of the membership of the Institution

7 Laws and Ordinances of the Orange Institution of Ireland (1830)
opposed the Act of Union. This of course demonstrates that some things do change—but we do not talk about it!

William Johnston of Ballykilbeg, (1829-1902) the Orange folk hero, is one of the most misunderstood heroes of Orangeism. His memory was resurrected at the time of the Drumcree crisis when he was eulogised as the man for our time. There is however a huge difference between defying The Party Processions Act in the nineteenth century by leading a procession from Newtownards to Bangor with green fields on either side, and parading along the Garvaghy Road. Johnston went to prison, and was not the last to make a name by doing so for leading the earlier parade. He also defied the Grand Lodge and he was asked the following year to explain his actions. He had previously defied the Grand Orange Lodge in their opposition to the Grand Black Chapter. He further defied Grand Lodge policy when he announced that he intended to support a bill to introduce a secret ballot for Parliamentary elections. The Grand Lodge had opposed the introduction of such an act.

One fact often left unsaid although it shows the complexity of the man: his daughter Ada converted to Catholicism and on Easter Sunday 1898 was received into the Catholic Church. While it was a great disappointment to the Orange hero, he, nonetheless drove her in his trap to Ballykilbeg Chapel Sunday by Sunday before proceeding to his own Parish Church.

The Protestants of Ulster were just as interested as their southern neighbours in the "three F's". Many of them, particularly the Presbyterian small farmers, supported Parnell and the Land League, in spite of being urged not to do so by their leadership. In fact in the County Tyrone by-election of 1881, the radical Liberal TA Dixon, who evidently had the support of Orangemen, defeated the County Grand Master Colonel WS Knox. The lesson is that self-interest is a powerful weapon—unfortunately this was not remembered at the time of the Belfast Agreement.

The Rev Dr Richard Routledge Kane (1841-1898), was the County Grand Master of Belfast (1885-1898), and according to the Orange historian RM Sibbett, had a "distinguished career in the interests of Protestantism and civil and religious liberty throughout the Empire" (Sibbett, 1939: p.603). Dr Kane was not only a great advocate of the Irish language but was also, one of the patrons of the Belfast Gaelic League which had been founded in 1895. In the annual Twelfth booklet published by the County Grand Orange Lodge of Belfast, in 1986, the Rev SE Long wrote an article entitled "Belfast's Orange Champion: Rev Dr RR Kane (1841-1898)." In an otherwise excellent synopsis of Kane's life, the Rev Long fails to mention Kane's advocacy of the Irish language and his connection with the Gaelic League. Long probably knew that those reading the article would have little sympathy with this important element in Kane's life. The politicising of the Irish language by the ultranationalists has borne bitter fruit within the Unionist constituency, where prejudice has fed on the propaganda, which seeks to air-bush the Irish dimension from the historical portrait of Orangeism.
It is worth remembering that Orangeism became unionist at the end of the nineteenth century—it is not exclusively unionist in its DNA. This is seen by the involvement in Orangeism of notable Irishmen like Isaac Butt in the first half the century and Dublin Resident Magistrate JH Nunn in the later half. Throughout the nineteenth century Orangeism, like the majority of the Protestant population, became unionist in their political ideology.

How are these significant events and people of the nineteenth century received in the Orange and unionist world of today? The short answer is they are not because they are ignored. No attempt has been made to understand these crucial events and personalities of the nineteenth century, let alone learn their lessons.

**MAJOR EVENTS OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY**

The running sore which was carried over from the nineteenth century into the twentieth was the Home Rule crisis. The Orange Institution came out against Home Rule as did the majority of Protestants because they saw Home Rule as Rome Rule. The Institution gave birth to the Ulster Unionist Party, where loyalty to the British Throne and Constitution took precedence over the unity of the people and the island of Ireland.

The bleak years of the first half of the century confirmed in the Orange and Unionist mind that Home Rule did mean Rome Rule. The special place in the Constitution of the Irish Republic for the Roman Catholic Church, the depletion of the Protestant population and the blatant sectarian incidents like Fethard-on-Sea, Co Wexford, all served to reinforce the Unionist and Orange position.

The spectacle of Government Ministers unable to enter a Protestant Church for the funeral of President Douglas Hyde, in St Patrick’s Cathedral in 1949 or Lucan Presbyterian Church for the funeral of the Rev Dr Irwin in 1954, communicated the message that the Irish Republic was a cold house for Protestants.

The special place for the Roman Catholic Church has gone from the Constitution. Roman Catholics can now attend Protestant churches. It is “all change but no change”, as the Orange Institution has officially failed to reciprocate these changes. I say officially as in practice this rule, of attending Roman Catholic Services, is like many others, kept in the breach. Minister Éamon Ó Cuív said at the opening of an Ulster-Scots centre recently that his aim was to demonstrate “that the Republic I serve is a warm home for all its citizens.”

The second half of the twentieth century saw the rise of interest in Ulster-Scots culture. Recent attempts to present the Orange Institution as a “cultural” organisation—even exclusively in terms of the Ulster-Scots culture is not an accurate reflection of the make-up of the Institution, either at its foundation or in the present day.

At the end of the eighteenth century the Orange Society was made up of the two main religious-social groups. The Anglo-Irish represented the Anglican religion of
the English settlers, while the Ulster-Scots (Scots-Irish) represented the religion of the Scottish Presbyterian settlers from lowland Scotland. In the present day, members of the Institution can largely trace their origins to either one of these two groups. It is therefore wrong to associate the Institution exclusively with only one of these groups—the Ulster-Scots. This emphasis on the “cultural” nature of Orangeism serves to demonstrate a lack of knowledge of the history of Orangeism where many of the Orange heroes of the past embraced an Irish culture. It is however ironical that this Ulster-Scots manifestation of Orangeism has failed to implement the words of the Scottish national poet Robert Burns:

O would some power the giftie gie us to see ourselves as others see us. (O would some power the gift to give us to see ourselves as others see us.)

As the twentieth century drew to a close the once unionist monolith fragmented over the Belfast Agreement. The lessons of the past were not learned, particularly the lesson of self-interest as people vote for a future rather than a past. The Belfast Agreement may well have been “Sunningdale for slow learners”, but generally, the unionist leadership of every hue failed to understand that every time they went to the negotiating table they went from a position of increasing weakness. On the broader political landscape this may well be an allegation launched against the first leader of Irish Unionism—Edward Carson.

Ultimately the confrontation over parades and the division and bitterness over the Belfast Agreement did a disservice to both Orangeism and Unionism. But both Unionism and Orangeism did a disservice to themselves over a much longer period. According to John Bew, “Brookeborough....was also willing to sacrifice the Union for a united Ireland if it contributed to defeating Nazism” (Bew, 2007). In what I found to be a very depressing book, “Unionism and Orangeism in Northern Ireland since 1945: The decline of the loyal family”, Henry Patterson and Eric Kaufmann catalogue the repetition of the failures in both organisations. It reminded me of that often quoted remark of AJP Taylor: “Like most of us who study history, he [Napoleon III] learned from the mistakes of the past how to make new ones” (Listener 6 June 1963).

THE CHALLENGE OF THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

The twenty-first century has already provided many challenges to both Orangeism and Unionism.

One of the first major events of the new millennium was to take place on 19 November 2001 when the Gaelic Athletic Association scrapped their infamous Rule 21. If the GAA could scrap a Rule created in the heat of the events of the 1920’s surely, one might think, the Orange Institution could change their prohibitive rules.

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8 Burns, Robert _To a Louse_
In 1849 and 1885 additions to the Qualifications included the phrase often quoted: “....and scrupulously avoid countenancing (by his presence or otherwise) any act or ceremony of Popish Worship.”

The rule prohibiting members marrying Roman Catholics first appears in Irish Orangeism in 1863. While this rule still forms part of "The Constitution, Laws and Ordinances of the Loyal Orange Institution of Ireland" (1998), it is not always enforced. In Canadian Orangeism this rule has been removed. The real challenge for Orangeism in the twenty-first century is to change in response to changing circumstances. This challenge was issued by Dublin Orangemen last year. A member wrote:

Is it not now time for the Orange Institution to change also? Is it not time to remove from the ‘Qualification of an Orangeman’ those references to our Roman Catholic fellow subjects of both Northern Ireland and the Irish Republic? References which they find offensive, and many of us find anachronistic.9

The century opened with the continuing discussion on the connection between the Orange Institution and the Ulster Unionist Council. It is worth noting as John Bew points out: “none of the formative figures in unionism....had a comfortable relationship with the Orange Order” (Bew, 2009: p.15).

While the Grand Orange Lodge of Ireland passed a resolution not to send delegates to the Ulster Unionist Council, it was in fact the Ulster Unionist Council which “broke the link” with the introduction of new rules in 2006, thereby ending a relationship which effectively began in 1886 (Flackes and Elliott, 2005: p.380).

After the Reverend Alan Harper was elected Archbishop of Armagh in succession to Robin Eames on 9 January 2007 he publically declared that it was time to dispose of the Act of Settlement 1701. In a subsequent debate on the BBC Radio Ulster programme “Talkback” the Orange Chaplain the Rev Dr Eric Culbertson claimed that if the Act of Settlement was revoked it would be “detrimental to the Gospel.” I for one cannot understand either the logic, let alone the theology of such a statement. I could understand the theology if the Church of Ireland was established by law—which it is not! It is still a matter of “all change but no change.” Underlying all this is the inability to analyse the events of the past. If the Act of Settlement was to keep a powerful political Roman Catholic Church at bay and prevent it encroaching on the “liberties of England”, now that the Roman Catholic Church is no longer a political power, how can the retention of the Act of Settlement be justified? These are the questions which need to be addressed.

Given the fact that during the “Stormont years” Irish history was not taught in State Schools, is it any wonder that the orange and unionist population are ignorant of the events of the past? If they are not aware of the events they will not be able to analyse them and apply their lessons to today.

9 Dublin and Wicklow LOL1313 Newsletter, Issue 8 Summer 2008:p.6
CONCLUSION

This is the real challenge which confronts all of us today. We have to know the past in order to learn its lessons. The challenge which is the responsibility of all of us, both individually and collectively is this—how do we change hearts and minds? How do we educate the present generation, particularly those in “deprived communities”, in the events of the past and enable them to learn its lessons? If we fail to do that in this generation we are committing future generations to repeat the mistakes of the past.

As Coleridge wrote:

If men could learn from history, what lessons it might teach us! But passion and party blind our eyes, and the light which experience gives is a lantern on the stern, which shines only on the waves behind us!10

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10 Coleridge, Samuel Taylor (1835) Table Talk
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