The Canadian Orange Movement. The Concept of Political and Social Tradition

What is Orangeism?
Orangeism is a Protestant movement of Irish origin that has its organizations (lodges) in Great Britain and in most of the former British colonies. Despite some differences among various Orange organizations, their basic principles remain the same: they work for the continuation of British rule and the preservation of the supremacy of Protestantism in the former British colonies. The Orange Movement (also known as the Orange Society, the Orange Order, or the Orange Association) is named after King William III of England (known as William of Orange) who is regarded as the father of Orangeism. The movement was formed in the British Isles as a result of a religious conflict between Protestants and Catholics. Its ideology is based on the democratic concepts that were established in the 17th century England by the Glorious Revolution, started by William of Orange in 1689. King William III remains the most symbolic figure and most significant statesman for all Orangemen. Orange organizations have been formed in various British colonies since William of Orange became the king of England. The Orange movement rapidly spread, first all over the British Isles and then it also found its way to the British colonies including Canada. William’s victory over James II and his Catholic army at the Battle of the Boyne in 1690

1 William III (of Orange) – Europe’s leading Protestant statesman, stadtholder of the Netherlands and King of England (1689-1702). He ascended to the British throne thanks to the support of the Protestant opposition that forced Catholic King James II to flee to Ireland.
2 The Glorious Revolution – events of 1688 that ended English Revolution; having ascended to the throne, William III of Orange laid foundations for the constitutional monarchy in Britain and secured Protestant liberties and domination in the British Isles.
3 Battle of the Boyne (12 July 1690). The Protestant army of William III defeated King James II’s Catholic army in Ireland. July 12, 1690, symbolizes the supremacy of Protestantism over Catholicism and is the most important and most celebrated date by Orangemen.
remains a symbol of the victory of Protestant values and its anniversary is celebrated on 12th July by Orangemen through marches and parades.

**Orangemen’s Contribution to Canadian history**

The Orange Association has been active in Canada for over 200 years, which makes it one of the oldest as well as one of the largest and most influential organizations. However, one must keep in mind the complicated history of the settlement of Canada, which provided a specific background and, to some extent, limited the development of the Orange movement. Many new settlers were happy to get away from the atrocities of religious persecution and for some of them the Orange movement (propagating the supremacy of Protestantism over other religions) symbolized the oppression of religious freedom.

Although it is not known when or where the first Orange meetings took place in Canada, there is evidence of Orange activity in the very early 19th century. Most historians agree that Orangemen were in Canada prior to the War of 1812⁴, and that Orangeism was probably introduced in Canada by British military troops stationed there. Demobilized British soldiers, together with Protestant immigrants from Ulster, prepared a solid ground for the future Canadian Orange Association (Senior, 7).

The official Orange Association was formed by Ogle Robert Gowan⁵ in 1830 in Brockville, Ontario. “In 1830 Canada’s Orangemen successfully […] issued their own warrants for establishing new lodges, thus giving birth to the Grand Lodge of British North America” (See, 74). The organization he formed was dedicated to maintain and popularize religious convictions.

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⁴ Orange associations, established by settlers from the British Isles, operated unofficially in Upper Canada as early as at the beginning of the 19th century. There is some evidence of Orangeism’s existence in Canada before the official Orange Association was formed. There are records of Orange meetings in New Brunswick in 1783 and in Ontario in 1808. Orangemen are also said to have fought with General James Wolfe at the Battle of the Plains of Abraham in 1759 and with Isaac Brock at the Battle of Queenston Heights in the American War of 1812-14. (See, 73-7).

⁵ An Irish immigrant, who is recognized as the founder of Canadian Orangeism. Gowan came to Canada convinced that Orangeism should be cultivated in the New World as a recognized organization. He became the first most prominent person (the Grand Master) of the Orange movement in Canada.
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of its members and to express their loyalty to British institutions symbolized by their flag – the Union Jack. Initially Orangeism was supported by Protestant immigrants from the British Isles, particularly by Irish immigrants. Houston and Smyth in their book stated that “geographical pattern of [Orange] lodges […] coincided quite closely with the distribution of the Protestant Irish” (Houston et al., 30). But the popularity of this movement grew steadily throughout Canada during the 19th century and became a part of the Canadian colonial identity. The main principles of Orange philosophy (Protestantism and loyalty to Britain) were values attractive not only to Irish Protestants, but also appealed to immigrants from other Protestant European countries. Sometimes even Native Indians and black people joined the movement. Orangemen started to represent a cross-section of the society. “Membership was not limited to successful artisans. The lodges were filled with laborers, street and railway workers, grooms, teamsters and others from the lower levels working class life” (Pennefather, 8). Only Catholics were excluded.

The Canadian Orange Movement nowadays
Since the end of World War II, the membership of the Orange organizations has steadily declined, though they still operate all over Canada and Canada is regarded as the strongest base of Orangeism outside the British Isles. The fall in number of Orange organizations is mostly connected with the change of the immigration structure. In many cases new waves of immigrants have little idea of Canadian political, religious or cultural life, they are unfamiliar with British traditions, therefore not interested in membership of Orange Association. Obviously, Asians or Africans are not interested in the promotion of Protestantism or constitutional monarchy, which makes the Orange Association unable to recruit members from these ethnic groups.

6 The Orange Association has always supported the idea of Canada as an integral part of British identity and in time of wars or rebellions Orangemen played active role in supporting British interests. The war of 1812-14, the Upper Canada rebellion of W.L. Mackenzie in 1837, suppressing the Fenian Raids at Ridgeway in 1866 and the rebellions of Louis Riel of 1869-1870 and 1885, the Boer War in South Africa (1899-1902), World Wars are examples of Orange active participation (Orange).

7 Prior to the World War II most immigrants came to Canada from the British Isles and Europe, Canadian form of government (based on the British political system) and English language were something they were familiar with. In recent years the immigration from Europe has declined, Asians and Africans have constituted the majority of newcomers.
Contemporary Orange associations have a very traditional perception of Canadian reality, especially in the way they perceive the most important political and social issues. Their attitudes to religion, government, public service or social activities are considered to be a return to the past, to the values upon which Canada and Protestant philosophy were founded. Even the way Orange associations are organized is influenced and shaped by tradition.8

One of the main aims of the Orange association in Canada is the promotion and extension of the Protestant concept of the Christian religion. Due to Orangemen’s sentimental attitude to tradition and history the conflict with Catholics is still present in Orange philosophy. The promotion of Protestantism is usually realized by contrasting Protestant religion with Catholicism. Anti-Catholicism, more characteristic for the Orangeism in Ulster, has played a less important role in the shaping of the Canadian Orange movement. Some authors even claim that Canadian Orange Order’s appeal “[…] did not require local Catholics to stimulate it […] Orangeism was strong […] and that strength was not dependent upon the presence of a local Catholic community comparable in size” (Houston et al., 40). However, Canadian Orangemen had not been freed of distrust of Catholicism. There are series of documents that clarify the Orange Association’s position against Catholicism9.

Two main differences between Protestantism and Catholicism are emphasized most often. First, it is the Protestant rejection of the Pope as an institution. Orangemen treat the church as a religious assembly where everyone is equal. They accuse Catholics of personifying the church by placing the Pope and bishops as leaders with unlimited, absolute power. They regard

8 It consists of a system of Lodges, most of them operate on a local level. Local lodges are subordinate to Provincial Grand Lodges. As the administration is strongly centralized, both of them rather do not play a decisive role and both are subject to the national body, i.e. the Grand Lodge of Canada (with a Grand Master as the head of the Association). There are separate lodges for women, teenagers, children and Black people. Women’s Lodges (Ladies’ Orange Benevolent Association) are allowed to elect their representatives in the national body, which is the Grand Orange Lodge of Canada (Orange).

9 Most of them come from the times of Reformation or from 17th-century England; they focus on the supremacy of Protestant religion over Catholic doctrines and are characteristic not exclusively for Orangeism but rather for Protestantism generally.
this as a personality cult, not a faith in God. They also do not trust in the Catholics’ ability of being loyal citizens. Catholicism seems to be treated as a threat to the constitutional monarchical system. They claim that one cannot be loyal to two heads of state (the Pope and the Queen) at the same time\textsuperscript{10}. However, that does not prevent them from expressing their loyalty both to Great Britain and Canada, to be loyal both to the Union Jack and to the Maple Leaf. They do not see any discrepancy in that. Secondly, the Orange movement is opposed to the ecumenical movement so strongly promoted by the Pope. They believe that ecumenism is aimed at establishing one church, with the Pope as the head of the Church, and at silencing the critics of the Roman Catholic Church. One of the anti-Catholic and anti-ecumenical manifests of the British Orange organization says:

The intention [of ecumenism] is clear; it is to establish one church […]. There are plans being put into operation to change the law for future monarchs to be able to marry Roman Catholics. We see the Ecumenical Movement as a group which compromises truth and in itself will become a religion […]. Within the churches who are part of the Ecumenical movement, all criticism of the Roman Catholic church has been silenced, because, all are told, to do so would be unchristian (Ecumenial).

Canadian Orangemen were even stronger in their anti-papist and anti-Catholic rhetoric. The \textit{Obligation of an Orangeman}\textsuperscript{11} reads as follows: “I swear that I am not, nor ever will be, a Roman Catholic or Papist; nor will I marry a Roman Catholic or Papist, nor educate my children, nor suffer them to be educated in the Roman Catholic Faith” (Houston et al., 37). It is also necessary to mention that the only requirement for joining the Orange organization is that a new candidate must be a Protestant. Orangemen claim that democratic values are reflected in Protestantism. Contrary to Catholicism Protestant churches are communities of believers with equal rights for

\textsuperscript{10} The \textit{Act of Settlement} (1701) is one of the most important documents for Orangemen; introduced many laws, among them, in Article II, it forbids to inherit the British throne to “every person or persons […] who shall be reconciled to, or shall hold communion with, the See or Church of Rome, or shall profess the popish religion, or shall marry a papist” (qtd. in: Williams, 58). The Act is a part of the British law and also refers to Canada, as the British monarch is a head of state in Canada.

\textsuperscript{11} Written in 1869 and recited by the new members to Orange Association.
everyone, no one is invested with the absolute power of the Pope or Catholic bishops. Therefore Protestant values should be the values upon which political and social relations should be built.

The other main objective of every Orangeman is to promote a constitutional, hereditary monarchy as the stabilizing force and the best, most truthful, and most rightful form of government. According to the Orange rhetoric, the advantages of the monarchical system of government over a republican government are clear and numerous. A hereditary monarch is, in most cases, more popular in the society than elected presidents or prime ministers. A monarch is a representative of the whole nation, while in the republican government system presidents or prime ministers are sometimes elected by less than a half of the electorate. If this ever happens in Canada, there will still be a monarch that will bring balance and stability to political and social life and will act as a brake on overambitious politicians (Canada’s). Monarchs are not concerned with their own political future and are less subjected to corruption than short-term presidents or prime ministers. They do not represent the interests of political parties or of a narrow electorate. Monarchy does not secure the benefits of certain social classes. The Queen symbolizes the history and tradition of both the country and her family, therefore she is doubly motivated to devote all her actions to the well-being of her subjects. Every member of the Royal family is trained for the position of the head of state, which gives the future monarch experience and great knowledge of the country, its people and its government. Hereditary monarchy brings stability and continuity because people know who will ascend to the throne. Monarch rules over the whole nation and is not involved in conflicts within the parliament or government. However, there is an argument for the preservation of constitutional monarchy that Orange Lodges oppose, and that is the divine right of the Queen to hold her position in the nation. They claim that their movement laid the foundations for constitutional monarchy and divine rights of the king are rather blasphemy and symbols of absolute power than of a parliamentary democracy. There is some inconsistency in this view – although the monarch is no longer thought to be chosen by God for his or her position, their main duty is to work for the preservation of Protestant values and it is the monarch’s obligation to take part in the nation’s religious and spiritual life.

The Canadian Orange Association supports the idea of a strong central government where the monarch should act as a centre around which the whole nation is gathered. Orangemen claim that constitutional monarchy,
Canada’s evolvement through its British connection and Protestant values brought freedom not only to Protestants but to all Canadians. Therefore, it is a duty of every Canadian to support actively the Canadian system of government based on British parliamentary democracy and to work for the united Canada, with a strong central government and a British monarch as the head of state. Maintaining the monarchy and a centralized government guarantees the strength of Canada and security of its citizens. Orangemen believe that the monarchical system and the unification of all Canadian citizens under Anglo-Saxon, Protestant heritage is loyal to the principles upon which the Dominion of Canada was founded, therefore secures the Canadian continuity, stability and respect for tradition. Canadian Orangemen’s attitude to monarchy and connections with Britain are best recognizable in the already mentioned *Obligation of an Orangemen*:

I do solemnly and voluntarily swear, that I will be faithful, and bear true allegiance to Her Majesty Queen, and to her lawful heirs and successors, in the Sovereignty of Great Britain and Ireland, and of these Provinces dependant on, and belonging to, the said Kingdom, so long as she or they shall maintain the Protestant Religion and the laws of the country: that I will, to the utmost of my power, defend them against her or any of them; that I will steadily maintain the connection between the Colonies of British America and the Mother Country, and be ever ready to resist all attempts to weaken British influence, or dismember the British Empire […] nor am I now, or ever will be, a member of any society or body of men that are enemies to Her Majesty and our Glorious Constitution […] (Houston et al., 37).

Nowadays the Orange Association also fights against all the political actions and events that could lessen British influences in Canada. First of all, they reject the policy of multiculturalism. There are many reasons for this. One is that the policy of multiculturalism excludes the supremacy of the Protestant religion and is not compatible with the hostile Orange attitude to Catholics. The anti-Catholic character of Orange parades takes these manifestations far from the idea of multiculturalism. The very definition of multiculturalism cannot be accepted by the Orange organizations. The policy of multiculturalism guarantees the equality of all cultures within Canada and secures the neutral and tolerant attitude of the government towards different cultures. For Orangemen the policy of multiculturalism is a distortion of history, an expression of disrespect for the traditions and values upon
which Canada was founded. The English language, close relations with Britain and the Protestant heritage are the universal principles which should be promoted by Canadian authorities. Powerful nations are built on solid foundations and nothing but British traditions and Protestant values have kept Canada strong and brought freedom and peace to all Canadians (including Quebecers and Native Indians). Orangemen expect immigrants to be loyal to the values represented by their philosophy since this is the philosophy which shaped Canada. They seem to treat themselves as the ones who brought freedom, order, liberties and civilization to French-speaking communities and Native Indians, therefore it should be a natural obligation of these groups to obey the laws and behave loyally. The promotion of cultural diversity leads to the decrease of the fundamental, universal values. Cultural diversity disintegrates Canada; it is dangerous for Canada’s unity and may lead to separatist tendencies (Senior, 62, 71, 96).

Out of all recent political events, the separatist tendencies in Quebec seem to be disdained most by the Canadian Orange movement. Considering the prevailing role of Catholicism in shaping Quebec’s history and Quebec’s hostile attitude to British traditions, the Orangemen’s negative perception of this province is not a surprise. The Orange attitude to Quebec, its culture and heritage is best illustrated in an article published in the Orange newspaper “The Daily Orange”. The article, ironically entitled “Quebec Secedes from Planet Earth” presents a fictitious vision of Quebec after the secession from Canada. The arguments for Quebec’s independence are trivialized and ironized:

The former Canadian province of Quebec seceded from the planet Earth today, marking the end of the new nation’s decades-old struggle for independence. The president of the new nation [...] informed The Daily Orange that his people ‘will at last be free to live our traditional, backwards lives in peace without fear of English encroachment or progress’ [...] ‘It became clear that Earth could not provide the people of Quebec with the ample maple forest and riverside farmland necessary for our backward-looking agricultural needs’ [...] ‘No longer will we have to suffer the insulting presence of Anglais business and the Anglais signs that come with it [...] we will finally return to our feudal land holding system’ [...] ‘The heritage and culture of our society is finally safe from progress and multilingualism. Oh glorious, glorious day!’ (Quebec, 3).
There is something characteristic exclusively for the Canadian Orange Movement, and that is a negative attitude to the economic and military integration with the United States. This position has deeper roots in the history of Canadian-American relations and the past fears of Canada being annexed by the United States. Orangemen still remember the War of 1812-14, Fenian raids encouraged by the US government and border disputes. There is still a conviction in the Canadian Orange Association that the US trade policy is aimed at subordinating Canada. Orangemen also realize that closer relations with the United States weaken British influences. They approve Canada’s participation in international agreements only if Great Britain is also a party of these agreements. Therefore, NAFTA or NORAD cannot be accepted. There is one more disadvantage of the US as a close partner: its government is based on the republican system, which is not accepted by Orange organizations. Moreover, this system was achieved by the US as a result of war against the monarchy, against Great Britain.

The Orangemen also claim that there are few other organizations that would give so numerous and meaningful contributions to Canadian history as the Orange Association has given. Therefore, it is a duty of every Orangeman to commemorate the events and notable Orange people who have contributed to the development of the Orange movement and Canada. William III, the Prince of Orange is the most important figure in the history of the Orange movement. He is regarded the father and the founder of the Orange movement, and symbolizes the Protestants’ supremacy. His victory over the Catholic army, led by King James II, at the Battle at the River Boyne (July 12, 1690) remains the most significant and symbolic event. July the twelfth is the most important holiday and is commemorated by Orange parades organized in the cities where Orange Associations operate. According to The obligation of an Orangeman participation in these parades is the duty of every Orangeman:

I swear that I will ever hold sacred the name of our Glorious Deliverer, King William the Third, Prince of Orange; in grateful remembrance of whom, I solemnly promise (if in my power) to celebrate his victory over James at the Boyne, in Ireland, by assembling with my brethren, in their Lodge Room, on the 12th day of July, in every year (Houston et al., 37).

12 John Diefenbaker was the last Orange Prime Minister (1957-63) and his policies concentrated on arousing anti-American sentiments among Canadians.
The biggest and most controversial parades are held in Belfast, Ulster. However, similar parades – though smaller – have taken place in Canada since 1822 when the first 12th July Orange Parade was held in Toronto. They are not so spectacular as they used to be in 1920s or 1930s, when Toronto, because of the large number of Orangemen living in the city, was described as “the Belfast of Canada”. Parades (though much smaller in size) are also held in other provinces where Orangemen live. Orange parades are seen by Orangemen as a part of their heritage and a celebration of their culture. One of the Canadian Orange websites describes the parades as follows:

The parades are a glorious display of pageantry. The color of the collaret or sash, the uniforms of the bands and the beautiful paintings on the banners combine to make an Orange parade a visual kaleidoscope. The flags and the banners are full of cultural and religious symbolism depicting, biblical scenes, famous people or events in history and in them selves portray the rich cultural heritage of our people in picture form. The music provided by the accompanying bands is of very high standard. You will find countless competition of bands including world champions in ranks, of flute, brass, accordion and pipe bands participating in Orange Parades (The Glorious).

The parades are colorful indeed. However, the decline of the role of the Orange movement led to a situation where 12th-July Parades have become rather an attraction for tourists. Even for the members of the Orange Order they are starting to loose their original meaning – they are not even organized on the 12th July anymore, but on the Saturday nearest the Twelfth in order to gather more people. Contemporary parades are best described by Jarman in his book:

As the membership has declined and aged and the influence of the Order declined so the route has changed. The parade is now held on the Saturday nearest the Twelfth, the route has been considerably shortened and there is no return parade [...] The Order itself now sees the Twelfth as a family day out. It has no political overtones and a picnic has replaced the platform speeches of some years ago. The police now regard the Twelfth parade as a relatively small and unproblematic event, which needs few officers and poses little concern (Jarman et al., 119).
Though William of Orange is the most important figure commemorated by Orange parades, Orangemen remember other notable Orangemen’s services to Canada. The list of those people is quite long, and among many it includes the names of four Canadian prime ministers: John A. Macdonald, John Abbott, Mackenzie Bowell, and John Diefenbaker; Governor-General Harold Alexander and also numerous premiers of Ontario and mayors of Toronto. Alexander Muir, the author of Canada’s first national song *Maple Leaf Forever* was also a member of the Orange Association. The premier of Newfoundland, Joseph Smallwood, was also an Orangeman. During his premiership Newfoundland was brought to Canada in 1949, thus the completion of Canadian federacy was possible. He and Prime Minister John Diefenbaker are regarded the last great Orange contributors to Canadian history.

The contemporary Orange Association is marked by traditionalism, which is expressed not only in the Orangemen’s respect for history and notable Canadians of the past. *Tradition* seems to be a favorite word for Orangemen. It is *tradition* that has shaped their movement. *Traditional* perception also predominates their approach to religion, public service, contemporary political and social issues. *Traditional* values were the base for the Orange movement’s foundation and, as Orangemen believe, upon the same *traditional* values Canada was founded. This last belief seems to be inconsistent with the complicated history of Canada, as it simplifies historical facts – it excludes the contributions of French-speaking communities, Native Peoples and other minority groups to what is called a Canadian heritage. But that can be easily understood if we take into consideration how incomplete a concept of tradition Orangemen bear in mind. The word *traditional* seems to mean exclusively “British” and “Protestant” and the promotion of such a concept of tradition is an obligation of every Orangeman.

**Works Cited**


