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## “Faith, Crown and State”: Contemporary Discourses within the Orange Order in Northern Ireland

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## **“Faith, Crown and State”: Contemporary Discourses within the Orange Order in Northern Ireland**

### **Abstract**

Despite a decline in membership in recent decades the Orange Order remains one of the largest and most significant organisations within civil society in Northern Ireland, representing a significant proportion of the Protestant population. The Orange Order claims a moral and political rationale to opposition to the 1998 Good Friday Agreement and many of the political consequences that have followed. Drawing upon a large membership survey of the Orange institution (the first such survey ever undertaken), and abetted by in-depth semi-structured interviews, this paper examines core political and social attitudes of Orange Order members in a post-conflict environment. It identifies core discourses on offer within Orangeism, and how these structure responses to contemporary events. It concludes that the maintenance of “traditional” discourses within the Orange Order (seen by its critics as a barrier to the modernisation of unionism) may be key to its endurance against the odds in a changing political context and increasingly secularized world.

**Keywords:** *1998 Good Friday Agreement, Orange Order, Northern Ireland, political discourse*

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## “FAITH, CROWN AND STATE”: CONTEMPORARY DISCOURSES WITHIN THE ORANGE ORDER IN NORTHERN IRELAND

**James W. McAuley and Jon Tonge**

### **Abstract**

*Despite a decline in membership in recent decades the Orange Order remains one of the largest and most significant organisations within civil society in Northern Ireland, representing a significant proportion of the Protestant population. The Orange Order claims a moral and political rationale to opposition to the 1998 Good Friday Agreement and many of the political consequences that have followed. Drawing upon a large membership survey of the Orange institution (the first such survey ever undertaken), and abetted by in-depth semi-structured interviews, this paper examines core political and social attitudes of Orange Order members in a post-conflict environment. It identifies core discourses on offer within Orangeism, and how these structure responses to contemporary events. It concludes that the maintenance of “traditional” discourses within the Orange Order (seen by its critics as a barrier to the modernisation of unionism) may be key to its endurance against the odds in a changing political context and increasingly secularized world.*

### **Introduction**

Orangemen interpret the Boyne as the conclusive victory of the Protestant Reformation in the British Isles. Their incessant marching is to demonstrate that all Protestants, but particularly those who live in Northern Ireland, must maintain a constant vigil against Rome. (Boyd, 1995, p. 60)

If being British and wanting to live under the Union Jack still means as much to the people of Northern Ireland as it did for their forefathers, then they will have to make the same determined stand. (*Orange Standard*, May 2007)

This paper highlights contemporary political ideologies and discourses within Orangeism and in particular, considers how it has positioned itself through political and cultural reactions to the peace process in Ireland. The Orange Order (correctly entitled the Loyal Orange Institution) is a large and complex voluntary, communal organisation. While it once claimed a

membership of up to 120,000 (one in three of all Protestant males in Northern Ireland) the current strength of the Grand Orange Lodge of Ireland is estimated at around forty thousand members (Stevenson *et al.*, 2007, p. 110). For many Protestants it continues to offer a central focus for social life and, although its political importance has declined drastically in recent decades, it retains an important cultural and religious influence in many parts of Northern Ireland. This paper identifies crucial political alignments and realignments within Orangeism that have taken place in recent years.

In so doing, this paper draws directly upon public declarations and texts produced by the Orange Order (mainly taken from the monthly publication, *Orange Standard*) and on material drawn from interviews with members. Within this, two important bands of discourse need to be recognised. First, those that contain “internal” messages; in many ways Orangeism represents a classic discourse community, representing a group of people, “who share common ideologies, and common ways of speaking about things” (Little *et al.*, 2003, p. 73). Second, the Orange Order also projects “external” messages that seek to frame and position the Order within distinct moral, social, and political arenas of life.

Beyond this, we then seek identity several, sometimes overlapping, discourses within contemporary Orangeism that give it political expression. We identify those discourses that unite Orangeism and give its membership a sense of identity and continuity. We then highlight political and cultural discourses that give the Orange Order much of its contemporary dynamic. Finally, we suggest how these discourses are drawn upon to construct visions of the future within Orangeism. To begin, however, we outline the collective and organisational bases of the Orange Order within which such discourses are formed.

## **Collective Identity and the Orange Order**

### *The Origins of the Orange Order*

The origins of Orangeism rest in the agrarian conflict of late eighteenth century Ulster and in sectarian conflict that emerged in and around County Armagh (Smyth, 1998). By far the most detailed (and best) account of the period remains Gibbon (1972), who clearly outlines how both Protestant and Catholic peasants organised in opposition, through agrarian secret societies, which became manifest in a series of violent confrontations. As a result,

Protestants formed the Orange Order in 1795 after a period of prolonged confrontation (Roberts, 1971) the grouping taking its name from William of Orange who defeated the Catholic King James II (Senior, 1966).

It developed structures and organisation that mirrored the Freemasons (Dewar *et al.*, 1967) and as a symbol of its collective solidarity the Order began to organise public meetings (the first Boyne commemoration parade taking place in July 1796). It remained largely rural-based, often organized in direct opposition to the rise of the nationalist United Irishmen; indeed Orangemen were armed and used by the government to militarily confront them. The Order also found growing support from the Protestant gentry, which noted the progress of Orangeism, “then gave support, finally took over and reorganized the movement, and used it as an instrument to preserve Protestant ascendancy” (McCaffrey, 1967, p. 144).

Throughout the 1860s and 1870s Orangeism “expanded rapidly in the face of resurgent nationalism” (Mitchel, 2003, p. 135) and by the late 1880s the Orange Institution had become well established in Ulster’s growing urban centres, with Belfast’s expanding bourgeoisie displaying an ever-increasingly involvement in its organization. This was given further momentum through political resistance to the Home Rule movement. Intensified political agitation meant that Britain was forced to consider the granting of some limited self-government to Ireland – “Home Rule”. Protestants became increasingly fearful of political dominance by a Catholic majority. As Jackson (2001, p. 119) suggests, the “significance of the Orange Order in terms of the ideological and institutional groundwork for Unionism can hardly be overstated”.

### *Structures and Activities of the Orange Order*

As a result, Orange Order membership expanded rapidly, playing a central role as Protestant Ulster sought to formulate coherent political opposition to reflect their perceived social, cultural and religious distance from the rest of the island, as “resistance to Home Rule injected the Order with new life and enabled it to recruit all classes to its ranks” (Crawford, 1987, p. 29). The organisation structures of Orangeism that developed at that time largely remain in place today. Membership of the Grand Orange Lodge of Ireland is organised into a hierarchal pyramid structure. At the base are about 1,400 Private Lodges to which every member must belong (Grand Orange Lodge of Ireland, 2008). The style of these varies considerably, “some being fervently evangelical, others little more than social drinking clubs” (Mitchel, 2003, p. 137). Within the broad structure of the Order,

private lodges elect representatives to District Lodges, which in turn send representatives to the County Lodge level. There are 12 County Grand Lodges representing Antrim, Armagh, Belfast, Cavan, Donegal, Down, Fermanagh, Leitrim, City of Londonderry, Londonderry County, Monaghan and Tyrone, which then elect representatives to the governing body of the organisation, with 300 representatives (Bryan, 2000, p. 97 –102; Grand Orange Lodge of Ireland, 2008).

Today the Orange Order is perhaps best known for its parading tradition, and the public demonstration of membership on the streets (Bryan, 2000). By far the most prominent, are the set of parades held annually on or around the Twelfth of July, to commemorate the victories of King William III (William of Orange) in the religious wars of the late seventeenth century (Elliott and Flackes, 1999, p. 381). In July 2007, for example, tens of thousands of members marched to 20 venues across Northern Ireland. In Belfast, the parade consisted of 134 lodges (including two from Scotland and one from Canada), supported by 69 marching bands and two floats (Belfast Telegraph, 13 July 2007).

Elsewhere, there were also smaller demonstrations in the Republic of Ireland and even reports that some members of the Irish Regiment serving in Basra had held their own demonstration (Rusk, 2007). More formally, the Order has an organised membership in Scotland (by far the largest outside of Ireland), England, Australia, New Zealand and Canada and the USA, as well as smaller groupings in countries such as Togo and Ghana (Harland-Jacobs, 2008; Patterson, 2008; Sweetman, 2000). These are all places where Orangeism found root on the back of emigration and Empire military service and active church representatives (Jess, 2007, p. 160).

## **Discourse and Ideology**

This section of the paper considers how we can begin to understand the discourses that unite Orangeism and give its membership a sense of identity that is relevant to contemporary society. In particular, the interventions of Foucault, particularly through his argument that the subject is constructed through discourses of power and knowledge (Foucault, 1977 and 1978) and that discourses are “practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak” (Foucault, 1989, p. 49) have positioned contemporary debates around discourse within the social sciences.

The concept of discourse has developed across a multitude of disciplines (see Abu-Lughod and Lutz, 1990; Howarth, 2000; Parker, 2002; Vighi and Feldner, 2007) and has become increasingly contested and challenged (Hall 1996, 2006; Sutherland, 2005; Žižek, 2005). The approach advocated by Laclau and Mouffe (1985, 1987) which conceives “all objects of inquiry or knowledge as discursive” (Purvis and Hunt, 1993, p. 492) have further structured debates concerning the nature of political discourses. Within the parameters of this paper, we place ourselves in the camp that seeks to continue to link discourse with ideology. Here we recognise that discourses “enable, they constrain, and they constitute” (Storey, 2006, p. 101). And with regard to shared identification, such as is found within the Orange Order, we subscribe to Doane’s (2006, p. 256) view that:

On the one hand, discourses shape the mental models, or “common sense” beliefs, through which individuals interpret social reality; on the other hand they collectively reinforce or transform ideologies.

## **Official Discourses of Orangeism: Faith, Loyalty and State**

There are several, sometimes overlapping, discourses currently on offer within Orangeism. Here we classify these as: official discourses; discourses of continuity; political discourses; discourses of unity; and, discourses of cultural resistance. The official discourses framed by the Orange Order are most readily identified by the “resolutions” adopted annually at the Twelfth of July parades. These resolutions are categorised under three headings: faith, loyalty, and state. As Stevenson *et al.* (2007) explain, resolutions are: “addressed or “spoken to” at all demonstrations across Northern Ireland by invited Orangemen who hold positions relevant to the resolution (i.e. politicians for speeches on “state” and “loyalty”, clerics on “faith”) or members of the County level of the organization” (Stevenson *et al.*, 2007, p. 110).

The resolutions around “faith” emphasise the claim to be a religious organization, and that its members should have “a sincere love for their heavenly Father” and that they should “make the Holy scriptures the rule of their faith and practice” (Smyth, 1995, p. 3). Orange membership also involves “an unambiguous rejection of the themes of the Roman Catholic Church” (Smyth, 2001, p. 128). The Order is “directly opposed to the ecumenical movement” (*Orange Standard*, July 1988), and those Protestant churches involved in that movement, as “the naivety of ecumenical-minded

Protestants never ceases to amaze” (*Orange Standard*, June 2003). It continues to oppose the secularisation of Sunday, to promote the “traditional Ulster Sabbath” and to call for “Sunday observance” (*Orange Standard*, June 1999).

This emphasis on the religious role of the Order needs to be set in context. Religion remains a “key ethnic marker” in Northern Ireland (McGarry *et al.*, 1995, p. 212). For the Order the maintenance of the Union is central to the defence of Protestantism, and the defence of Protestantism is core to the defence of the Union. Hence, Orange Order membership is also an expression of political identity and support for unionism (McAuley and Tonge, 2007). The particular framing of this by the Orange Order can be seen directly in the other resolutions presented. The loyalty resolution in 2007, for example, highlighted the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the liberation of the Falkland Islands. This was linked directly to the “sacrifice” of those 311 members of the Order who were killed during the Northern Ireland conflict. The final resolution around the state provided the most overtly political output stating that, “like many others within the unionist community, [Orangemen] share grave reservations about the presence of those in government whom we would not see as democrats in the accepted sense of the term” (cited in *News Letter*, 12 July 2007).

### Discourses of Continuity in the Orange Order

Much of the strength of the Orange Order rests on an emphasis on cultural reproduction. This involves emphasis on continuity, both physically in terms of membership and in the reproduction of cultural memory. Joining is often a product of generational support for the Order and a communal sense of solidarity expressed through membership. Of those surveyed a large majority of members joining in the past twenty years did so for “family reasons” or because of “family traditions”. The following quotations from members discussing their reasons for joining, illustrate the point well:

It was traditional, it was like sort of ... very much family orientated ... you know, sort of family blood. It was kind of the done thing, that when you came that age, you followed your fathers and your uncles and so forth (Interview AM01, Belfast).

Family tradition, father, grandfather, grandmother, great grandfather, brothers, so [membership was] very much something that was within the family. It was very much a matter that my father had asked, “what



do you feel about joining the Institution?” I said, “well, I’ll give it some thought”. I knew that my grandfather was an Orangeman, and my grandmother was an Orangewoman. My great grandfather was an Orangeman. So, it was, it was part of my family heritage and also part of my culture of course (Interview AM02, Belfast).

It is important to recognise how, through these senses of tradition and longevity, Orange discourses relate to broader senses of unionist identity and are bound into a “grand cultural unionist narrative” (Porter, 1996, p. 87). Crucial within this process of self-identification are the ways in which collective memories are used to construct political identities and understandings. The reproduction of Orange discourses explains how members of the Order can best relate to the wider social and political world. Those memories, once brought to the fore, work to strengthen senses of identity (Norvick, 1999, p. 5). Several writers have, for example, firmly established the centrality of the Battle of the Somme in the formation of senses of loyalist identity (see Brown, 2007; Graham, 2004; Graham and Shirlow, 2002; Officer and Walker, 2000). Such constructed memories help determine the ways in which individuals formulate and secure their understandings of everyday life and how they connect to broader political collectives. Take the following extract from the *Orange Standard* (October 2006), which links the sacrifice in two World Wars directly to contemporary senses of loyalism and identity:

The people of Northern Ireland displayed their loyalty in Britain in two World wars, with great loss of life, through the sacrifice of its soldiers, sailors and airmen, and the 1,000- plus citizens of Belfast who died in the German air raids of 1941. ... Northern Ireland Protestants have nothing to feel embarrassed about as far as their membership of the United Kingdom is concerned. They are as British as the people of England, Scotland and Wales, and that is the way it will remain for the foreseeable future.

Likewise, one of the resolutions at the 12<sup>th</sup> July demonstrations in 2008 highlighted the 90<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Battle of Passchendaele at the Somme campaign during the First World War, when the 36<sup>th</sup> Ulster Division sustained significant loss. As the Order expressed it, their “memory remains with us today and we pledge ourselves to remember those who gave their lives and hold their memory for future generations so that their loyalty, courage and sacrifice will never be forgotten” (cited in *News Letter*, 12 July 2007). Thus, Orange identities are framed and maintained by the strength of discourses that emphasise links to much broader communal political-cultural

memories, which in turn legitimise an identifiable set social and power relations within Northern Irish society.

### **Political Discourses of Orangeism**

So while the Orange Order continues to project itself as “unashamedly Protestant and Unionist” (*Orange Standard*, October 1999) it is clear that from its inception the Order has been part of a broader formulation of political values, and a political dimension has “been part of its essence” (Storey, 2002, p. 64). As Roberts (1971, p. 269) put it:

The Order has never claimed that its political purposes and activities are unimportant, and the function of Orangeism as a creator and preserver of a complex political and social identity need not be regarded as a purely latent one. The motivation for many a member and leader has been political, not religious, and the political endeavours and successes of Orangeism may well be more apparent to non-members and enemies than any religious aspect.

Broadly, the political discourses of Orangeism are framed by the following worldview:

The Orangeman is at one a religious man and one concerned for the quality of life for people in the place where he lives. This is why there has always been in Orangeism the emphasis on religion and politics. In life there is no separation of the one from the other. It is inclusive of both, the spiritual and the practical, for the practical is the outworking of the spiritual in everyday living. As a man believeth so is he. We use “politics” in that wider sense for everything that matters in their lives from birth to death. It includes all that concerns people and politicians about how their country is governed, what they want to do with it and get from it. (*Orange Standard*, September 2003)

One member expressed this directly when he said: “the political background here is entirely different than anywhere else, because the politics here are not just about who’s best within the country; the politics here is, ‘do you want to be part of this country, ‘do you want to be part of that country?’” (Interview AM01). For many members, the question is one of balance between religious and political expression. Indeed, as Kennaway suggests, “the present generation of Ulster Protestants look at their religion through political eyes”, although he is critical of the fact that it is the former which has the greatest influence on the latter (Kennaway, 2006).

#### *Orangeism and the Ulster Unionist Party*

The traditional outlet for party political expression by Order members has been through the Ulster Unionist Party (UUP). Such links are longstanding. Indeed, the UUP developed directly from a meeting of the Orange Order, attempting to give the expression of Orange-Protestant-Unionist identity a more political direction, through the coherence attempt to

politicise the perceived difference of Ulster (Jackson, 1989; Walker, 1996). Following the formation of the Northern Ireland state, the Orange Order was instrumental in the UUP forging and maintaining its position of hegemony (Boulton, 1973; Kennaway, 2006) and Orange membership became obligatory for anyone aspiring to a position of leadership within the UUP.

A reciprocal relationship developed; the Order benefiting from members holding high political rank. Between 1921 and 1972 (when Northern Ireland came under direct rule from Westminster), all six Prime Ministers were members of the Order (Kaufmann, 2007; Millar, 2004, p. 19). Unionist politicians, especially at election time, presented themselves as key defenders of Protestantism and the Union, and drew directly on Orange mobilised support. Throughout much of the history of the Northern Ireland state, the UUP has looked to support from Orange Order to shore up its vote (with much success). Protestant-Unionism became the dominant discourse of the political ideology of the new Northern Ireland state as other social and political perspectives became marginalized. This ideology was reproduced through the Order itself, thus in the mid-1960s, for example, one leading Orangeman, the Reverend Ross was able to claim that:

We believe as Orangemen that our Order is the fabric of Northern Ireland. Without our great Order the social and political structure of the Six Counties would become flabby and anaemic. Orangeism is entwined with the very history of our Province. (Ross, 1964, p. 5)

While Orange Order membership has steadily declined over the past three decades, the organisation undoubtedly continues to hold a central position in the social world of many Protestants, orientating members and broader unionist reactions to political events. Thus, the Order continues to project itself, “as a nerve that runs right through the heart of the Protestant community” (*Orange Standard*, August 2004). The formal relationship has changed noticeably in recent years, culminating in March 2005, when the Order announced it was breaking the alliance with the UUP, cutting directly political, religious and cultural bonds with Northern Ireland’s “establishment” party that had lasted for a century. While there were mixed views within the membership, the following is typical of those who supported the split:

Clearly you know, for decades it was aligned directly with the Ulster Unionist Party, until quite recently, I mean that’s something I think has benefited the Institution ... Personally, I think it was long overdue, to break the link. I suppose the Orange Order was originally set up to protect the Protestant people, I mean that was one of its basic functions away back in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. So, I suppose, it had a certain

background in ... you know where it probably aligned itself to one particular strong political party at the time. When the State was formed in the last century. But now the UUP doesn't really speak for many in the Institution ... I'd be more of a DUP man myself. (Interview JM02, Belfast)

### *Orangeism and the Peace Process*

The politics of Orangeism were brought into sharp relief by the peace process. Throughout the contemporary period, the leadership of the Orange Order, and much of its membership, have opposed the terms of the settlement brought about through the 1998 Belfast (Good Friday) Agreement (hereafter the Agreement), which they regard as part of an ongoing series of concessions designed to weaken unionist resistance to an all-Ireland and who remained convinced that the Agreement could not, “bring about a just and lasting peace” (Grand Orange Lodge of Ireland, 1998). Indeed, Martin Smyth, the former Unionist MP and ex-Grand Master recently claimed that the power-sharing Assembly, marked the: “erosion of democracy and ... a sad decline in our national and international standards” (cited in McAdam, 12 July 2007).

By the time of the 2001 Westminster election, support for the pro-Agreement UUP was in noticeable decline, with a small majority of Orange members choosing the DUP over the UUP (Tonge and Evans, 2004). By 2004 this trend had become pronounced, with almost two-thirds (65 per cent) of Orange Order members surveyed declaring a voting intention for the DUP, compared to less than a third (29 per cent) for the UUP. The overall decline in unionist support for the UUP's promotion of the Agreement was accompanied by political realignment within the membership of the Order (McAuley and Tonge, 2007).

We have offered explanations for the move of political support within Orangeism and the undermining of the UUP as the traditional party of Orangeism (McAuley and Tonge, 2007). Broadly, however, primary in any explanation of the shift in Orange support towards the DUP has been the dovetailing of Orange Order and the DUP's perceptions that unionism has been in political, religious and cultural retreat because of the consequences of the Agreement. Orange Order members voted almost two to one (61 to 33 per cent) against supporting the 1998 Agreement (McAuley and Tonge, 2007; Tonge and Evans, 2005), making opposition within Orangeism more extensive than that in the broader unionist population, where some 57 per cent offered support for the Agreement (Hayes and McAllister, 2001).

### *The DUP and the Reordering of Orangeism*

Part of the strength of the DUP response rested in its success to frame unionism in a particular way, drawing directly on common sense and collective understandings of defeat, victory, values and identity that are found across unionism. The DUP promotes itself as the only legitimate guardian against incursions by Irish nationalism and republicanism, while all other unionists are seen as ineffectual and/or complicit in the downfall of Northern Ireland. A key self-defined task for the DUP has been to undo the perceived concessions made by the UUP and to continue to put political pressure on republicans. Collective memories directly inform the contemporary political debate. In particular, the public discourse of the DUP projected the peace process as another in a long line of events attempting to dilute unionism – the end of the Stormont parliament, the arrangements made for a power sharing executive under Sunningdale, and the Anglo-Irish Agreement – to name but a few.

The DUP claim that they seek to return unionism to what they see as its doctrinal fundamentals is heard and understood by many Orange members. The overt opposition of the DUP to the 1998 Agreement and the positioning of the Party as the key defenders of the Protestant Unionism proved to be a centrifugal force causing the reordering of unionism (McAuley, 2002). The broad stance of the DUP in expressing both moral and political opposition to the Agreement was deeply meaningful to many within the Orange Order. Such changes have, in part at least, been brought about by a dramatically changed social economic profile in the membership of the Order. In particular what (Kaufman, 2007) refers to as the increased proletarianisation of the membership has meant changes in political affiliation towards the DUP.

Those self-identifying as working-class now form the bulk of Orange Order members, with fewer than twenty per cent defining themselves as middle-class (McAuley and Tonge, 2007) with most middle-class Protestants now clearly expressing social and political distance from the Orange Order (O’Leary, 1998; Pollak, 1996). The perspective offered by the DUP has continued to resonate with the membership; our sample indicates that since the Agreement was signed in 1998, more DUP than UUP supporters have joined the Order, and that support for the DUP continues to be dominant within the Order, although this has in turn been challenged following the entry of the DUP into a power sharing government with Sinn Féin.

## Discourses of Unity in Post-Agreement Orangeism

The Orange Order continues to centre on the construction of unionist and Protestant unity in what are still perceived as uncertain political times. The Order argues that Protestants will increasingly turn to them to safeguard their interests (*Orange Standard*, June 2000). Thus, the leadership has increasingly projected the organisation as capable of unifying unionism. They appeal for the reconstruction of the “unionist family”, as it “is not too late for Unionists to get their act together and to defeat this evil conspiracy which seeks to destroy their position and this Province and put it under the heel of Dublin” (*Orange Standard*, April 2003).

Such calls for unity have become central to much of the public discourse of Orangeism, and can be seen in claims that for Orangemen: “the great desire is still for a single Unionist party” (*Orange Standard*, June 2005) and that the Order “will lobby for Unionist unity on all key issues” (*Orange Standard*, April 2005) or through demands that “Unionist parties must agree”, (*Orange Standard*, July 2005), that “Unionist unity must be achieved” (*Orange Standard*, September 2001) or that “Unionist unity is a priority” (*Orange Standard*, September 2002). Recently, the leadership has claimed that, “all Protestants who care for the welfare of this Province, and who cherish its place within the United Kingdom must go to the polls” (*Orange Standard*, May 2003) and that it is the duty of all members to vote, “if they treasure their British citizenship and identity” (*Orange Standard*, November 2003).

Sometimes the demands are made even more directly, such as, “Unionist must vote – or else!” (*Orange Standard*, May 2007); or that, “all Orange brethren must unite and vote” (*Orange Standard*, May 2005). In *realpolitik* this means promoting a political pact, between the UUP and the DUP. Such a view finds support from within the membership, which increasingly fears a split in the unionist vote in any forthcoming elections, and the likelihood of a strengthening of Sinn Féin representation. Hence the claim, that:

Whatever the future may hold for Unionism its aspirations can only be realised through all shades of Unionist opinion uniting and working under one banner. Uniting Unionism is as relevant to-day as it was 100 years ago (Alexander, 2005, p. 43).

This also draws on longer-standing discourses within Orangeism concerning the lack of political awareness and mobilisation of its members.

In 1995, for example, the Order produced a booklet to celebrate the organisation’s Bi-Centenary. In the editorial, Martin Smyth sought to position Orange Order as follows:

many of its members are deeply complacent, not only regarding their own spiritual standing, but about the future of Ulster. This Province has suffered defeat and humiliation at the hands of dedicated, articulate and cunning pan-nationalists, aided and abetted by some of the most powerful forces within the British establishment and the White House (Grand Orange Lodge of Ireland, 1995, p. 3).

These comments highlight another consistent discourse within Orangeism, that they must be eternally vigilant against those who would seek to undermine the core tenets of Protestant Unionism.

### **Discourses of Cultural Resistance: The Importance of Parades**

For many Orange Order members the very existence of Northern Ireland remains under threat, as “enemies within and without threaten Unionism” (*Orange Standard*, September 1998). According to this discourse, these enemies are focused on one key objective, “the ultimate incorporation of the Province in an all-Ireland in which British, Protestant, Orange and Unionist culture and identity would be swamped and eventually eradicated”. The category consisting of those who seek to bring about the downfall of Ulster Protestantism is widely constructed. Take the following:

It is the traditional enemies of Protestantism and Unionism - Irish nationalism and republicanism - which is spearheading this attack on Northern Ireland’s loyal ethos. But it is being aided and abetted by Government policies which can only have one outcome - a weakening of Northern Ireland’s position within the United Kingdom. (*Orange Standard*, April 1999)

All of these discourses are woven together to place the Order at the heart of Protestant-Unionist responses to contemporary events. Wright (1996) suggests that a continual sense of siege is a “central reality of Northern Protestant society”. In the contemporary period they have pointed to what they believe as plans for the “de-Protestantisation” of Northern Ireland, as part of an “onslaught being waged against the British identity of the province” (*Orange Standard*, February 2004). At its utmost, some sections of Orangeism talked of “ethnic cleansing pursued by Irish republicanism for over 30 years” (*Orange Standard*, December 2002).

More recent discourses suggest that while the physical war has been replaced by “a cultural war being waged against unionism and Orangeism”

(Hume, *News Letter*, 13 July 2007, p. 35). “Orange culture” remains “under attack” (*Orange Standard*, August 2000) and that Orange members are involved in a “Culture war We Must Win” (*Orange Standard*, March 2008). As the *Orange Standard* expressed it:

The shooting and bombing “war” in Northern Ireland is hopefully over, but the battle for the hearts and minds of the people will be fought with greater intensity than ever. Let no-one be under any illusions. The campaign by republicans and nationalists to erode the British identity of Northern Ireland will be stepped up in many ways, and the Orange Order will need to be in the vanguard of resistance to this latest phase in the strategy of the republican-nationalist alliance to try and achieve their objective. (*Orange Standard*, July 2007)

Fears surrounding attacks on Protestant Unionism, both real and symbolic, continue. This takes several forms. Some are concrete, such as a series of arson on Orange Halls that have taken place over the past decade. Others rest on the wider belief that Orange culture is constantly and coherently being undermined. This has found its clearest expression around the issue of parading, which is now deemed to be “top of the republican ‘hit’ list” (*Orange Standard*, August 2000). There are over 3,000 Orange parades in Northern Ireland every year, of which a small number (around sixteen) remain disputed (Mullin, 1998). In recent years, restrictions have been placed on several parades, particularly those that are routed through interface districts (between Catholic and Protestant areas) or areas where Catholics are in a majority.

The most prominent of the contentious parades during the mid- and late-1990s – from the Protestant church at Drumcree near Portadown – remains unresolved. The reason why a reasonably obscure march to and from a Protestant church should have become international news and towards the top of the agenda of the Orange Order can only be fully understood if we consider the following words of Gordon Lucy, Chair of the Ulster Society in the early days of the saga. As he put it, there is, a perception “that if Orangeism lost this particular battle in the heartland of Orangeism, routes all over Northern Ireland would come under attack” (*Irish Times*, July 13 1996). Although the intensity of the conflict around Drumcree has ebbed since the 1990s it has remained central to the Orange psyche, and to symbolise much wider concerns about the perceived retreat of Protestant Unionism.

Importantly, such “anti-Orange” activity is seen as another challenge to Protestant cultural identity, and as part of a wider schema, which is “a product of a carefully prepared and thought out plan of action by Sinn Féin/IRA” (*Orange Standard*, August 2000). For the Order:



Marching has become an even greater focus of attention in recent years because republicans have decided that, having spent 35 years slaughtering members of the Protestant community with the gun and the bomb, they have now moved into the next phase of the plan to break Protestant resistance so as they can achieve their end goal – the destruction of Northern Ireland as part of the United Kingdom (*Orange Standard*, August 2004).

This is sometimes presented as part of a wider campaign against Britishness and the Orange Order, of which the following views are indicative:

The hate campaign launched in the media against the Protestant people has been unrestrained and sustained. Newspapers have shamefully vied with each other to come up with some new angle to blacken the Ulster Protestants. (*Orange Standard*, September 1998)

No Orangeman is in any doubt that the media treats him, and the Orange Institution, with little understanding and less sympathy. (*Orange Standard*, October 1998)

### **Discourses of the Future**

Despite the widespread changes in the political landscape of Northern Ireland, not least of which is the introduction of a working power-sharing devolved government, many within the Orange Order fear for their future. Many Orange members continue to be suspicious of the “other” community, even in the new political era. Take, for example, this statement from a leading member of the Orange Order made in early 2008:

I see Sinn Féin as the other side of the IRA coin, and in spite of what may have been said with regards to the IRA, their err, renunciation of violence and all the rest, I still see the organisation as having the potential if it ever needed to, to pick up its arms again, and err, there’s always been the big question mark, as to what extent all the arms were decommissioned and destroyed. There’s always going to be a big question mark over that. I know that, err, [unclear] and his group said that they were satisfied and that decommissioning had been comprehensive and complete, but there will always be a big question mark over that because there was, there wasn’t ever the opportunity of people who would have been very sceptical and most stringent in their demands with regards to verification, and the IRA refused the whole way down the line to allow these, err, very critical, very sceptical people to see what was going on. (Interview AM02, Belfast)

The fears of this section of the leadership have not been eased by the emergence of a devolved government and the agreement of the DUP to enter into a power sharing administration with Sinn Féin. As this member expressed it, his reactions were “surprise, shock and stunned”. He expanded as follows:

For the leadership of the DUP to have preached what they did preach for the years they preached, and ... there was people probably done time for what that man preached, and then to backtrack, you know, either he was, he was right for 40 years and wrong for one year, or he’s been wrong for 40 years and right for one year, you know. So, history will tell us. (Interview JM02, Belfast)

At best some thought power-sharing “a price worth paying to get local government” or “a price that had to be paid” (Interview JM01, Belfast). At the same time, however, this member claimed he had “become more suspicious of them [Sinn Féin], more mistrusting” (Interview JM01, Belfast). As the *Orange Standard* (June 2000) argued:

The decision of the Democratic Unionist Party to share power with Sinn Féin will not affect the long-term goal of the latter. To do their utmost to bring about a united Ireland ... No-one in Protestant Ulster should be under any illusions.

Beyond this, there are concerns about how the Order can make itself relevant in an increasingly secularised society and engage with public discourses within civil society. In response, the Order has deliberately set about attempted to improve its often extremely negative public image, especially at times of disputed parades. Under the guidance of a new young, and often highly educated leadership grouping, for example, the Order has attempted to re-brand its Twelfth of July parades as community festivals. The most prominent of these is “Orangefest”, which the Northern Ireland Tourist Board (2008) now describes as “one of Europe’s largest cultural festivals with music, marching and street pageantry” undertaken in a “carnival atmosphere”. Such images are no doubt central to winning the culture war for the Orange Order, but the public relations campaign is far from won. Sinn Féin Assembly member John O’Dowd, for example, claimed that the “proposed ‘Orangefest’ will be seen as little more than ‘bigotfest’ in the eyes of the vast majority of people not connected to the Orange Order” (Sinn Féin, 2008).

## Conclusions

In Northern Ireland, the boundaries between society and the state, between civil activity and the political realm remain blurred. This is readily identified in the roles undertaken by Orangeism and the structures and discourses of the Orange Order. Overtly, Orange discourse remains centred upon several core elements: the Protestant faith and Christian principles, loyalty to the Crown and to a state that guarantees civil and religious liberty. These discourses run alongside each other; sometimes they are overlapping, and often, members place different emphases on different strands.

Whilst in one sense contemporary discourses simply reproduce some of the traditional roles of the Order, the contemporary dynamic is different. Traditional alliances have become marginal to the political direction the Order seeks to take and the majority of its members. While there are different elements and discourses emphasised by members, for many politics and religion remain about the existence of the state. Some who have recently joined the Order have been attracted by the discourse of consistent opposition to what are seen as the negative consequences of the Agreement for unionists. Once they have become members, they have worked to strengthen this discourse. Others seek to modernise the organization and make it relevant in an increasingly secular and globalised society. What is clear, however, is that the overarching discourse is that all of these elements can only be guaranteed by the continuance of the Union between Northern Ireland and Great Britain, and the core belief that the Order must act as a bulwark to ensure the maintenance of the constitutional link that remains primary.

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