



## SECTARIANISM IN SCOTLAND AND IN GLASGOW: THE PRESENT AND THE PAST

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**Abstract:** *In popular understanding, the word “sectarianism” in Scotland describes the religious conflict and prejudice between Catholics and Protestants and it is directly connected with the events in Northern Ireland, but it doesn’t involve the mainstream of Protestant and Catholic churches. Steve Bruce defines sectarianism «a widespread and shared culture of improperly treating people in terms of their religion» (Brice et al, 2004: 4). Sectarianism has its origins in the wide fluxes of Irish people to Scotland in the middle of Nineteenth century and it developed big social conflicts in the past. “Divided city” is a very popular novel by Theresa Breslin: it describes Glasgow as a city in which clashes and prejudices between Irish Catholics and Scottish Protestants still happen in daily life, often connected with the football teams of Glasgow Celtic (mostly supported by people with Irish background) and Glasgow Rangers (mostly supported by people with Scottish background). Focusing also on the divide between Catholic schools and Protestant schools, the article aims to reflect on the effective presence of sectarian attitudes and manifestations in Scottish society and on the possible solutions to face them. The paper is based on a literature review about the past and the present situation, and on the data collected during a qualitative research that the author has done in Glasgow in April/May/June 2011 with the supervision of Stephen McKinney, Senior Lecturer at the University of Glasgow, Faculty of Education. During the research, social officers, police officers, leaders of religious association, researchers and activists had been met and interviewed.*

**Keywords:** *Scotland, sectarianism, community, faith schools, interreligious conflict, social conflict.*

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Graham was walking in the East End of Glasgow, when he met a older boy that stopped and asked him: «What are you doing here? You don’t belong here. You have got a Protestant face». These words really impressed him, «it hadn’t occurred to him that Catholics might think that Protestants looked different from them. His knew that some protestants regarded Catholics as a separate race. He hadn’t realized it worked the other way. His Uncle Maxwell believed absolutely that Catholics had definite physical characteristics that were not the same as Protestants. [...] Graham looked at the boy challenging him. If anything, this boy’s head was considerably bigger than Graham’s own. “You are a Hun”, the boy said, blocking the pavement. “Naw”,

said Graham, trying to tough it out. “I’m gonna give you a kicking anyway”, the older boy decided» (Breslin, 2006:37). *Divided city* is the title of a very popular novel by Theresa Breslin. As the author said during a interview in June 2011, «it was written in response to requests by young people in Glasgow asking me to write a novel about football rivalry between Celtic and Rangers» (Zannoni, Breslin, 2011). The themes inside the book and the whole subject of ethnic and religious clashes in Glasgow and in Scotland are quite wider than a football rivalry, as Theresa Breslin said and as we are trying to develop in this article: «I wrote *Divided city* true to life as experienced by people living in certain circumstances. A book title has to be arresting and succinct and this one not only refers to Glasgow but probably every other city in the

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world in that among large groupings of people from different social, cultural, economic, and ethnic backgrounds there will be tensions and divisions» (Zannoni, Breslin, 2011). Starting from a historical excursus, we are going to analyze the presence of sectarian attitudes and manifestations and their effects on the contemporary Scottish society.

### 2. SECTARIANISM IN SCOTLAND

**2.1 Defining sectarianism in Scotland.** In popular understanding, the word *sectarianism* describes the religious conflict and prejudice between Catholics and Protestants in Scotland and it is directly connected with the events in Northern Ireland, but it doesn't involve the mainstream of Protestant and Catholic churches. Steve Bruce defines sectarianism «a widespread and shared culture of improperly treating people in terms of their religion» (Bruce *et al.*, 2004:4). Stephen McKinney (2008: 336) suggests taking the “working” definition constructed by Liechty and Clegg (2001:102-103) for their research about sectarianism in Northern Ireland: «Sectarianism is a system of attitudes, actions, beliefs and structures, at personal, communal and institutional levels, which always involves religion, and typically involves a negative mixing of religion and politics. Sectarianism arises as a distorted expression of positive human needs, especially for belonging, identity and the free expression of difference and is expressed in destructive patterns of relating: hardening the boundaries between groups; overlooking others; belittling, dehumanising, or demonising others; justifying or collaborating in the domination of others; physically or verbally intimidating or attacking others». Stephen McKinney disagrees with Steve Bruce and prove that sectarianism is still pervasive in Scottish society, maybe in the attitudes more than in the concrete violent manifestations.

**2.2 Sectarianism in the past.** There had always been seasonal traffic between the north-east of Ireland and Scotland, but in the middle of the nineteenth century the economic hardship in Ireland, the potato famine of 1849

and the opportunity in the industries, in the mines or in the fields turned mobility into permanent migration. Together with Catholics, many Protestants came from Ulster and settled above all in the western and central industrial Lowlands; many of them were Orangemen who brought with them a culture of anti-Catholicism, and found some benefits attending the local Orange lodge and the local church. Ulster migrants found a communal identity with the Scottish people, and the main agency for the transmission and consolidation of this identity was the Loyal Orange Order, founded in Armagh in 1795 to defend Protestants against the aggressive actions by the Catholic secret societies. The organisation was based on a hierarchical structure of lodges and the inter/intra-cohesion was enhanced by an elaborate system of grips, passwords and signs which developed a sense of collective brotherhood. In a few time the Order became hugely popular and many new lodges spread across Ulster and in Scotland, above all in the areas where Irish Protestants were more numerous. Because of their lacking industrial skills, their ill education and their poor conditions, Irish immigrants entered at the bottom of the Scottish labour market. As Steve Bruce (2004:12) writes, «the arrival of the Irish in Scotland coincided with the great wave of urban expansion and industrialisation. The long-term result of industrial growth was massively increased prosperity, but the early stages were often extremely unpleasant. Those native Scots who found their conditions uncongenial could observe that the Irish and the problems of industrialisation arrived at the same time and some blamed the former for the latter». In the early 1850s some anti-Catholic organisations such as the Scottish Reformation Society and the Scottish Protestant Association were founded and journals such as *The Scottish Protestant* and *The Bulwark* hosted anti-Catholic claims. As Devine (1999: 292) reports, «these groups were not simply defenders of the ‘true’ religion but also saw themselves as protectors of the Protestant Scottish nation from invasion by an ‘inferior’ race who, they claimed, threatened to bring disease, crime and degradation in their wake».

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Although not all the Irish were Catholic and not all were poor, the first immigrants put themselves in a community clearly demarcated by their shared religion and as self-sufficient as they could do, sustained by the Church and by an array of ancillary organisations that provided social welfare, church-approved social and sporting activities, to build and celebrate a shared identity. According to Gallagher (1987:19), «the Irish side of the ghetto frontier may even have been patrolled more vigorously from the inside than the outside».

Some important protagonists of the Victorian era, such as James Begg, John Hope and Jacob Primmer, engaged in anti-Catholic public speeches and mobilizations, but the clergy and civil elites didn't support anti-Catholicism and it started to become steadily less popular. The Protestant ruling class wished the Catholic community to improve its conditions and it didn't oppose Catholic schooling. At the beginning, poor funding was the main problem of Catholic schools because they were funded by the government in a small part, and by the Churches, families and association in a bigger part. Churches elites understood that Catholic schools could no longer survive outside the public educational system and, in 1918, they signed the Education Act. Catholic schools entered into the state system and the Church maintained powers and autonomy in teaching recruitment and religious degrees. This kind of more competitive Catholic school became very important to the growth of a Catholic middle class. Meanwhile, immigration slowed and a new generation of Catholic born in Scotland grew steadily. In 1923 the Church and nation committee submitted a report entitled *The Menace of the Irish Race to our Scottish Nationality* that argued that Irish Catholic migrants and their descendants «cannot be assimilated and absorbed into the Scottish race. They remain a people by themselves, segregated by reason of their race, their customs, their traditions and above all by their loyalty to their Church, and are gradually and inevitably dividing Scotland, racially, socially and ecclesiastically» (Burrowes, 2003:143).

This position reflected the beliefs of a marginal militant Protestant fringe, while most of the political and intellectual elites rejected them. Due to the economic depression, the mass unemployment and the increase of Scottish emigration, the period between the First and the Second World War has been described as the most intense phase of sectarian bitterness in Scotland, during which the Irish Catholics became the easiest scapegoats for Scotland's calamities; on summer 1935, violence was so pervasive that Catholics organized all night vigils to protect chapels from vandalism.

Many Irish Catholics struggled the Second War side by side with the Scottish Protestants and showed brave loyalty to the British flag. It had been the beginning of the process of the decreasing of sectarian violence and of the rising of social mobility opportunities for the Irish Catholics. A new age of ecumenical activity began in the 1960 and some significant reconciliatory action between the Church of Scotland and the Church of Rome marked the erosion of institutional sectarianism.

**2.3 Sectarianism in the present.** On Sunday 6 March 2011, the *Guardian* reported about wild west-style brawls in Glasgow's pubs, officers injured, fans arrested, aggression on streets and a rise of domestic violence by 81% after the football match between Celtic and Rangers. Because of the great fear that the sectarian violence of the past could once again rear its head in a city that is riven by religious prejudice and football divide, Scotland's first minister, Alex Salmond, called an emergency summit in Edinburgh to discuss the problems

Scottish Football Association was established in 1873 and from the 1870s and the 1880s football developed a mass following and became the working man's game par excellence. Football wasn't simply a sport, it also became a powerful focus of national identity and an empathically working class game that reflected religious, community and ethnic differences, promoting local identities. Glasgow Celtic was the main team of the Irish Catholic immigrants. It was founded on November 1887 as a charitable organization to

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raise money to help the poor of the East End, but «at the same time it kept young Catholics together in their leisure time, free from the temptations of Protestants and Protestantism» (Murray, 1984:41). The other big team of the city, the Glasgow Rangers, quickly emerged as the team of the Scottish and Protestant pride, and sectarian bitterness started to be present between the supporters of the two teams: «Celtic and Rangers had become the standard-bearers of their two communities and their confrontations on the football field a noisy outlet for the bitter sectarian tensions of the west of Scotland» (Devine, 1999:362). Fan violence and sectarian attitudes have characterised the following decades and persist today. Common signs of the interweaving between football, religion and immigration can be found in the flags and in some of the sectarian songs that most of supporters know, as the titles *No Pope of Rome* and *The Boys of the Old Brigade* suggest. During the last decades Celtic and Rangers clubs have made big efforts to modernize themselves and to overcome the sectarian and local attitudes, but the stadium is still one of the main theatres where sectarian attitudes, expressions and manifestations take place, even if not the only one. Sectarian manifestations can be categorized at individual, group, institutional and cultural level. Even if it possibly occurred in the past decades, institutional sectarianism in the working places or led by police or municipalities is actually very unusual. At individual, interpersonal and group level, we can find patterns such as the use of a sectarian language, jokes and little asides in everyday life, chants and songs in pubs and at the stadium, graffiti and vandalism on the streets, intimidations, discriminations, verbal and physical violence between people from different groups or inside families, where sectarian values are transmitted along generations. A qualitative study conducted by Ross Deuchar and Chris Holligan in winter 2008 confirms that there are in Glasgow hidden territories in terms of football and that a sizeable minority of Glaswegians may avoid particular areas of the city due to the religion or their football affiliation. There are in

different areas Rangers pubs adorned with Union Jacks and Celtic pubs which display the tri-colour, and people can be attacked if they go into a pub wearing the wrong colours. Analyzing sectarian happenings, we always have to consider the importance of the context, and most of the times we have to consider the working class context. A number of young working class men support football teams, use a rude and violent language, are used to brutality, drink too much, take drugs, carry weapons and respond to minor insults with vicious attacks. Many of these young men don't know the meanings of their sectarian expressions; a growing secularization along the new generations has almost cancelled the religious influences, so their attitudes have to be included inside their wider range of antisocial behaviors and inside a pervasive culture of prejudice (against every kind of foreigners and minority groups) in Glasgow.

Steve Bruce (2004:172) argues that there is little evidence of discrimination against Catholics and notes that although churchgoing Catholics follow their own moral choices, they don't form a coherent subculture: «We find little evidence either that Scots Catholics are now objectively distinctive or that many Scots treat them as if they were. There is no major 'descended-from-Irish-Catholics' language, cuisine, dress style, residential preference or leisure activity. Descendants of Irish catholic migrants are much more likely than other Scots to practice Irish dancing or to belong to the Ancient Order of Hibernians, but very few people do either. Even religion has lost most of its force as a source of difference as the Catholic Church has followed the Protestant churches in rapid decline». Steve Bruce concludes that Sectarianism in Scotland is quickly declining and its manifestations are often limited to the contexts of some football matches. Michael Rosie (2004) takes a different position and considers sectarianism in modern Scotland as a manifestation of bigotry and prejudice: even if it's not systematic and it doesn't materially affect the life chances of entire religious groups, it remains a serious social problem, hence the debate.

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**2.4 Focus on faith schools: finding from a qualitative research.** According governmental data, Scotland has 377 state-funded faith schools: 373 Catholic, one Jewish and three Episcopalian. In total, there are in Scotland 2.722 public schools. Since the Education Act of 1918 is still working without any changes, the debate on the presence of faith school in the public system is often in the pages of the newspapers and in the middle of the political agenda. In May 2011, through meetings, focus groups and interviews in parishes, educational services, associations, administrations and universities, we have collected the point of views of different people who, in their daily work, have to face the themes of sectarianism and faith schools in Scotland. «My personal view is that I don't think it's a good idea to have two different schools. It doesn't help because it's a kind of separation, I suppose it's not healthy». This is the point of view of the current bishop of the Scottish Episcopal Church in Glasgow, a minority denomination in the city, which has less influence and a smaller number of fold. «I think that Catholic schools help people to express their culture, or a particular faith. They aren't against the other faiths, they don't suggest anti-religious actions. Catholicism gives identity». These are the words of the manager of the Harp Community Project in Glasgow; it's the point of view of a Catholic and Irish young man, that works on the themes of the Irish pride to support and to improve the condition of life of the Irish community in the city. At the opposite side, we have the straight opinions of a member of the executive board of the Grand Orange Lodge of Scotland: «We have serious rooted bigotry or sectarianism in Scotland, and we must tackle it through education. The problem that we have in Scotland is that we separate young people at the age of five. We think it's wrong. Children go together to pre-schools and nursery schools at three and four years old, and then they become five and "sorry, you are going in different schools". We feel that's wrong. And we feel that everyone in Scotland should be educated in a state school system. We don't see the need for two separate schools. I just

think that we are in the modern age, in Scotland the Education Act was signed in 1918 and it has never been resented, and now we are in 2011, people have to stay together, I think that it's wrong to discriminate people because of the religion. But the Catholics don't want to change». Every year, in July, the Orange lodges organise a big march through the Glasgow city centre, to celebrate the Protestant pride; during the march, police has to work hard to guarantee the public security.

Formed in 1990, as Scotland's national ecumenical instrument, Action of Churches Together in Scotland (ACTS) brings together nine Christian denominations; on the website, we can read that «it encourages and resources encounters between them in which each participant learns from the other, where difference is explored and respected and where division is healed». Its General Secretary focuses on the religious identity: «Catholic schools in Scotland is a false argument against the religious identity. There are Catholic schools in every country in the world where you are allowed to have schools, the only ones that don't allow Catholic schools tend to be totalitarian. I think that unfortunately people see the schools as a cause of sectarianism or a continuation of sectarianism: I don't recognize that. There are other questions going on there, other issues, about fear of difference. Despite Catholic teaching in Catholic schools, most of the children don't go to church, but most of the children have a concept of what Christian values are». Catholic teaching is considered as a privileged way to achieve a better understanding of the major values of the whole universe of Christianity: it should be the starting point to dialogue with the other big faiths, Islam at first. Religion is seen as the field for the inclusion, as a place where people from different traditions and cultures can meet each other and build friendship and common understanding. The Ecumenical Officer of Glasgow Churches Together is sceptical: «Catholic schools aren't ready for the dialogue. I would like to promote the dialogue between the Catholics and the others, but in Catholic schools this kind of dialogue is not so common. Several times I have tried to involve

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Catholic schools to organise interfaith events and meetings, but they haven't been so collaborative. We have to change people mentality. It's easier in the schools to talk about the big faiths in the world, about Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, than to talk about the different denominations inside Christianity. It's difficult to build a clear understanding that such denominations live together in the same big family».

Sense Over Sectarianism is a partnership with funding from the Scottish Executive to give grants to individuals and community groups setting up projects that challenge sectarianism and bigotry. The Social Inclusion Officer that leads this program suggests that the theme of sectarianism and religious divides has to be faced in a wide range of contexts and by many agents. Schools play an important role, but they can't have the whole solution: «Catholic schools are inside the Education Act, and until the law changes they will continue to exist. Lots of people point Catholic schools, and lots of people point at the football, and blame the schools and football for perpetuating sectarianism. My argument is that what people do it to distance themselves from the argument and not take responsibilities on things. I think that it's really easy to blame on something outside, rather than to take responsibilities in the society».

### 3. CONCLUSIONS

The debate on sectarianism in Scotland is complex and the different researches assume different views considering how much sectarian attitudes are pervasive in modern Scotland. As times have gone on, the world has changed and nowadays we have to consider the sectarian themes in the biggest dimension of a global world, in which people have to be and to feel at same time as Glaswegians, Scottish, British, European and global citizens. Pursuing the aim to build and consolidate the profile of the new global citizen, it is necessary to have the cooperation of different agencies and institutions to tackle sectarianism at its different levels,

manifestations and fields. It's important to promote dialogue and opportunity for exchanges of experiences and cooperation between the different faith/ethnic/football groups, above all with children and teenagers. The role of the schools is very important and it must be supported by some integration on the Education Act and by the development of projects in partnership with the police, the municipality and the cultural associations. In this direction, many activities still exist.

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