A Brief Overview of French Canadian Nationalism in the 19th Century
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In my presentation, I will only address some of the questions raised by French Canadian Catholic nationalism. I will begin with a quick look at the notion of nation, of nationality to be precise, when it first appeared among the political elite of the colonial province of Quebec within the British Empire. The patriot movement was in many ways similar to other early 19th century self-determination movements and its inspiration was openly modern, but it nonetheless led to an impasse, among other reasons because of England’s relentless suppression of such dissent. Indirectly, this episode set the stage for the Catholic Church to assume moral and political leadership to the detriment of the liberal bourgeoisie. My attention will then focus on the contingencies and circumstances linked to the rise of clerical nationalism which, notwithstanding some adaptations, was to last over a century. What surfaced from the close relationship between Catholicism and nationalism was “French Canada” as an ideological and empirical notion, a sociological entity rather than a political one. In that organic unit, I will argue, the Church played the role of a state providing the people with their main social institutions to such an extent that I will talk of a “Nation-Church” to describe the phenomenon.

The creation of the Dominion of Canada ushered in a new era partly due to a drastic demographic shift within the total Canadian population and in part to the coming of Irish immigrant contingents, and finally partly due to the rise of a new imperialism firing the imagination of British colonists. In the fast-growing, newly-born and self-governing colony, the last factor served the nation-building stream well without imperilling the Empire’s future, and offered a rival vision of Canada to the French Canadian one. Be that as it may, a new political context, obvious from 1885 on, was characterized by the twin process of marginalizing the French Canadian clergy within the Catholic Church and marginalizing French Canadians within Confederation. For different reasons, the French Canadian clergy encountered growing difficulties in putting forward

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1 Parts of this paper has been presented at the 11th International Conference of the Spanish Association for Canadian Studies, 17th and 18th November 2006, in Miraflores de la Sierra (Madrid) under the title “French Canadian “Clerical “ Nationalism, the British Empire and the Canadian State in the 19th century”.
its vision of North American evangelization to Roman Curia. The deflated Church still managed to keep its hold on the French Canadian society but its political influence was progressively confined to the province of Quebec. With the advent of the 20th century, French Canadian nationalism blossomed outside the Catholic Church, experiencing a renewal. Finally, the First World War, and especially the conscription crisis, led to a widening gap among French Canadian Catholics in general and the French Canadian clergy in particular. Disappointed by the Canadian federal state because it would not take their interests into account, and more specifically would not enforce their conception of the country, French Canadians progressively turned their backs on the federal entity, slowly embracing the Quebec provincial state as their nation. This transformation, however, was not completed before the 1960s and will not be touched upon here.

A clarification must be made concerning terminology. It is only during the second half of the 19th century that the term *French Canadian* came to be widely used to refer to those under study here. Prior to about 1850, they simply called themselves *Canadians*, a designation that dated as far back as the French regime when the second generation of French settlers developed a means of differentiating themselves from the administrators back in France (Carpin 1995). Even though the geographical reality of “Canada” considerably changed from the time of the French regime to the First World War, the ongoing “official” name of the country owes a lot to its French speaking inhabitants. Canada was their country, the land where their ancestors were born.2 As for the notion of nation, it was closely related to liberalism when it first appeared in the early 19th century colonial province; it was a political notion imbued with a dream of self-determination. But after 1840, the notion crossed, so to speak, the political spectrum to become a conservative idea dedicated to the preservation of the cultural features of the community.

*The Patriot national movement*  

2 The lyrics and music of the present national anthem were actually composed by two French Canadians in 1880 (A.B. Routhier wrote the lyrics that C.Lavallée put in music). No English version existed before Chief Judge R. S. Weir wrote one for the 300th Quebec city anniversary in 1908. Still, the *O Canada* did not dethrone the *God Save the Queen* until late in the 20th century. Most of the times, both songs were performed at public ceremonies. Indeed, it is not before 1982 that *O Canada* was officially adopted as the national anthem by the Canadian Parliament in 1982, it was done at a very symbolic moment, in the aftermaths of the lost referendum on Quebec’s sovereignty.
With the granting of representative government, the French Canadians heartily espoused British principles of government. These new subjects of His Majesty were such good students of British political principles that they significantly contributed to the evolution of parliamentary institutions in Canada (Dawson 1970). During the years of constitutional battles, there is no clear evidence of French Canadian ethnic self-awareness. To the contrary, it seems that the political elite had a vision of French Canadians as British subjects who were thus entitled to all the same privileges, rights and duties as any other British subjects. But the political definition they put forward was also compatible with a socio-cultural membership based on features such as the Catholic religion, the French language, the Coutume de Paris as civil laws, and the seigneurial social system. The Canadian Party, founded in 1806 to promote their interests, assembled all those who saw in the colony their only home-country and, consequently, put its interests above all else. Its members included English-speaking members of Parliament elected in French, mixed or English-speaking constituencies. The Party was renamed the Patriot Party in 1826 to counteract the oligarchy’s accusations of being anti-British and of presenting a racial, not a political, opposition. The ethnic conception of French Canada in fact permeated England’s perception of the colonists! It seems quite clear that it was because French Canadians were not of British stock that England was so reluctant to grant them all the British liberties attached to British citizenship. For instance, she waited until English-speaking Canadians (the majority of whom were of British stock) outnumbered French Canadians before granting the colony responsible government (Bernier and Salée 1995).

The Patriot ideology also echoed the contemporary European movement which advocated replacing authoritarian monarchies with parliamentary democracies, on the one hand, and the South American movement of escaping from the mother country’s political control, on the other (Bellavance 2004). The deafness of England in regard to their legitimate claims resulted in an increased popularity for Republican ideals among the

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3 With the conquest of New France, England is for the first time confronted with having to govern a non-British people and had then to reflect upon how to combine power and cultural difference.

4 In Upper Canada as well as in the colonial province of Nova Scotia, the similar structure of representative government produced the same political dissensions. But only in Lower Canada, where the political
Patriots. During the 1830s, tensions ran high as they received a blunt refusal from London of their long list of demands (known as the “92 Resolutions”). The Governor General dissolved the Assembly in order to mute criticism, but this only contributed to moving protests into the streets. Finally, armed rebellions were organized, first in 1837 then again in 1838, both of which were easily crushed by the British army. London took the attempted uprisings very seriously and accordingly modified its colonial politics, which henceforth overtly aimed at assimilating French Canadians.

The ripening conditions for conservative nationalism and of the Catholic Church as spokesperson

The failed rebellions hit the Canadian political class hard with the exile, deportation, imprisonment and even execution of some of its members, as well as with a fairly generalized demoralization that accompanied the Union Act. Passed in 1841, this legislation was deliberately designed to secure English political dominance over the French. Some politicians reacted by jettisoning their liberal patriotism and by initiating outright collaboration with the English-speaking Canadians. L.-H. Lafontaine is the archetypal figure among these politicians who repudiated their past involvement with Patriot activities and pinned all their hopes on the institution of “responsible government.”

These new circumstances can be seen as the political conditions contributing to the prominence of a truly conservative ideology in which Catholic nationalism was deeply embedded.

Although the Quebec Act had officially recognized the Church, there were not even 500 priests in all of Lower Canada in 1840. But as soon as Ignace Bourget was nominated at the bishopric of Montreal, he set about organizing the church and structuring the Catholic population. He recruited associations, congregations and division rested along religious and ethnic lines, were these unrests labelled as “ethnic”. To the Lower Canadian political elite, colonial problems resulted from colonial mismanagement; in always favouring the same little group and social class, who were English, to the parliamentary majority’s disadvantage, the oligarchy in fact created an “ethnic” division within the colony.
religious communities in France to come and established them in Canada. The industrious bishop achieved so much that in only forty years the number of priests more than quadrupled, increasing to well over two thousand by 1880 (Hamelin 1961). A religious revival, although “top-down inspired”, thus popularized Catholic practices and church attendance. Worship of the saints, devotion to the holy family and the rosary, pilgrimages, processions and other magnifications, all blossomed with sentimentalized and flamboyant fervour (Fay 2002:272). The revival also meant a more Romanized Church: the clerical vestments and collar, as well as the liturgy and ceremonials, were borrowed from Roman traditions. Bourget’s zeal not only consolidated ecclesiastical institutions; it also introduced ultramontanism⁵ into the Canadian Church, with its doctrine of the non-separation of Church and State (Ferretti 1999). The Catholic Church soon took over many aspects of Canadian social life, including hospitals, homes for the poor, and orphanages; in fact, everything having to do with health care and social welfare was taken on by one religious community or another. The registers recording births, marriages and deaths were also kept by local priests. Finally, the Church contributed to establishing the confessional education system through which Catholic virtues were gradually incorporated into all French Canadian ideals⁶.

In just a few decades, with its communitarian piety and the warmth of its devotional life, the Church supplied the French Canadian people with a transcendental vision of their new situation, and conversely the people identified their fate with that of the Catholic Church. Indeed, St. John-the-Baptist day, named after Quebec’s patron saint, had been a patriotic day since the founding of the nationalist Saint-Jean Baptiste society in 1834, but it became a religious celebration after 1840 (Lamonde 2000: 328).

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⁵ Since the Middle Ages, thinkers of this tradition had divided the Catholic community of France into those who supported the position of their king and thus claimed the power to intervene in the organization of the French Church (Gallicans), and those who proclaimed the Pope’s supremacy considering he was above the king (Ultramontanes). In the 19th century, the term “ultramontane” came to define those among Catholics who followed the Pope’s teachings to the letter, refused to adapt to modern realities, and claimed the Church’s independence from civil authorities, sometimes going so far as to place the Church above the state.

⁶ We must not believe, however, that this takeover occurred without difficulty. To be in the ascendancy, the Church had to fight hard against Rougisme, a republican, anti-clerical and resolutely democratic doctrine that flourished with an undercurrent of Liberal youth. See Y. Lamonde (ed.), Combats libéraux au tournant du XXe siècle, Montreal: Fides, 1995.
Eventually, it would become impossible to separate the national from the Catholic, or religious, cause; together they tended to form a complex whole. The Church’s definition of the French Canadian nation explicitly refuted that of the Patriots, which had a strong liberal and emancipating connotation. As emphasized by a clerical ideologist in the 1840s, “it is not borders, nor even laws or political administrations which make a nationality; it is a religion, a language, a national character” (quoted in Dumont 1993: 227 and Lamonde 2000: 286). The entanglement of Catholicism with nationalism later evolved into a close relationship between the Catholic faith and the French language according to which the latter was the best means to keep alive the former, and was condensed into the motto “the language, guardian of the faith.”

Rome’s official and factual position was to avoid any confrontation with England and to seek instead to be accommodating. In Canada, there was a sort of tacit agreement between the “Papist” Church and the “Protestant” Crown according to which the former was authorized to develop and spread its ramifications throughout the colony in exchange for its praise of the latter (Guindon 1990; Ferretti 1999). In the long run, this conciliatory spirit worked against the French Canadian clergy, and against the French Canadian minorities outside the province of Quebec. The French Canadian episcopate nevertheless yielded to the official position of the Church, only adding to it the interdependency of the Catholic faith, the French-Canadian nationality and the British connection (Voisine et Sylvain 1984: 115). On the whole, it must be noted that through clerical nationalism the Church offered a philosophical and cultural response to the ideological and political void resulting from the Union Act. This, in turn, provided the people with a more or less stable identity, in a time of substantial economic, demographic and political changes. Around the 1850s, the term *French Canadians* came to supplant *Canadians* in designating those from French descent. This terminological novelty was accompanied by an emphasis on the so-called traditional features of the nation, on the cultural traits characterizing the “race.”

7 In the Canadian 19th century, the term “race” was commonly used to refer to the social dimension of a collective being. In that sense, “race”, “people” and “nation” were interchangeable notions.
unreachable, the only way left to objectify the nation seemed to be to give it an ethnic or cultural content (Beauchemin 2001).

**French Canada : a socio-cultural reality**

A huge migration movement toward the industrial towns of New England in the United States occurred in the ensuing years following Confederation. Generally speaking, jobs in New England were plentiful and better paid than in Quebec, but when economic recession hit American cities, French Canadians would come back for a few years, to their farm or to live with a member of their family, before trying their luck south of the border once again. Most of the time, their children would become Franco-Americans: there were more than 500,000 Franco-Americans in 1900, and they numbered almost 750,000 when the migration dropped off thirty years later (Roby 1995: 131-156). Catholic parishes and school were established, French Canadian cultural and religious practices, transplanted, and soon a string of “small Canadas” spread out in and around New England. At first, these migrant-adventurers were depicted by the clergy as morally weak fellow countrymen yielding to the American materialistic sirens. As the movement intensified, hinterland colonization campaigns were organized to try to redirect the flow of wanderers within Quebec’s borders, and in this way a number of remote regions were populated (Courville 2000: 547-554). But the continuing steady tide led to an ideological turnaround: with their French and Catholic institutional network, those parish communities became integral parts of French Canada, now presented as missionary outposts dedicated to the conversion of the whole sub-continent. Soon the Church framed a God-given mission: just as some individuals were called upon to embrace the priesthood, French Canada was called upon to display Catholic virtues for the edification of the world; she had a sacerdotal vocation. As theologian L.-A.Pâquet argued in a sermon delivered at mass during a St.-John-the-Baptist celebration in 1902:

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8 At the time of Confederation, in 1867, there was a little less than 3.5 millions inhabitants of which about 30% were French Canadians. Despite the important waves of British immigration and massive French Canadian migrations to the United States in the ensuing years, the French Canadians, thanks to their high birth rate, still managed to count for a little less than one third of the total Canadian population at the outbreak of the First World War (Urquhart and Buckley 1965).

9 A French publicist, E. de Rameau de Saint-Père, well-read by the French Canadian religious and political elites, gave this idea its notoriety.
We are not merely a religious people; we are messengers of the religious idea (...) Our mission is less to handle money than to stir ideas; it consists less in lighting the fire of factories than in maintaining and shining forth the illuminating source of religion and thought.10

The Church and economics

A lot has been written about the “pastoral calling” of the French Canadian people and its concomitant depreciation of money matters. Allow me to insist here on the fact that Catholic doctrine presents a hierarchy of values. Within this configuration, economic matters surely were at the lowest rung of the hierarchical ladder. But it does not follow that they were overshadowed altogether, only that they bore no value in themselves, that they must always be appraised using another criterion than a strictly material one. Most often that not the yardstick would be moral: work, thrift, and honesty were the only laudable ways to prosperity. But it could also be “national”. A classic study has shown that for the sake of the nation, the Catholic Church was quite ready to get involved in economic development. It seems that the growing tide heading to American industrial cities was the mainspring of the manifold economic activities undertaken through Church initiatives. From the bishops’ conference to the humble parish priest, everyone strived to have the French Canadians stay on the soil as farmers, but beyond that goal, the Church powers also worked at generally invigorating economic life. For instance, they encouraged and sustained the opening up of new settlements; they were church and school builders in the new parishes; they petitioned the government for pulp mills, sawmills, flour mills, clothing factories, brickyards, food-processing industries, etc; they demanded modern communication facilities (roads, bridges, railroads, electricity, etc.) from local administrations; they improved local agricultural practices and products by urging farmers to switch from the cultivation of cereal crops to more remunerative dairy farming; and they partook in the founding of agricultural clubs and co-operatives of all sorts, including the local Caisse populaire, the co-operative financial institution initially launched so that French Canadian could access funds by grouping together their savings. Although this banking institution did not really facilitate large scale industrial

investment\textsuperscript{11} it did help to finance local and community-oriented businesses. In fact, the Church was always eager to promote effective means of fostering economic solidarity. Finally, clerics played an intermediary role between local workers and industrialists by preventing labour conflicts, and more generally, by spreading a consistent work ethic. As long as the capitalists whether they were British, American or French Canadian did not directly confront nor disregard local religious customs, they were welcomed and warmly blessed by the Catholic clergy. The Church was more wary of international – in fact American – labour unions, which were suspected of being infiltrated by communists\textsuperscript{12}. The Church’s involvement was instrumental in establishing Quebec’s reputation for having a docile workforce that was unfamiliar with strikes, and in that sense, the institution indirectly, if not directly, promoted industrialization. On the whole, despite its general depreciation of economic matters, the Church nonetheless contributed to the material welfare of French Canadians and it encouraged economic development in many different ways, provided that such development did not spoil French Canada’s main cultural – i.e. Catholic – traits (Ryan 1966).

\textit{A “Nation-Church”}

In 1867, a new state, the Dominion of Canada, was founded, inaugurating a period of self-governing colonial status within the British Empire (Riendeau 2000: ch. 11). What was mainly at stake in the English-speaking provinces was mainly economic in nature, but in Lower Canada, the question was more whether or not Confederation allowed for the defence of the specific interests of the province, in other words, its religion and nationality. With the exception of Bourget, all five Quebec bishops were in favour of Confederation, one of them going so far as to acknowledge a divine blessing in the new constitution (Fay 2002:126). Episcopal assent resided in the sharing of powers between the two levels of government, where education and social assistance fell under provincial jurisdiction. More specifically, Section 93 of the British North American Act protected the religious minorities’ school system by promising “federal intervention in cases where a province infringed the rights of denominational schools” (Ibid.: 128).

\textsuperscript{11} the number of noteworthy French Canadian entrepreneurs remained small
\textsuperscript{12} At the turn of the century, the Church will organize Catholic unions within which the chaplain will have a major role, sometimes even that of spokesperson.
By the mid-1870s, the French Canadian vision had widened and a new awareness progressively emerged that embraced the French reality throughout Canada, making the Métis and the Acadians “sister communities,” at times members of a collective “us,” and endowing Quebec with the specific role of defender of French and Catholic minorities in other provinces. The numerous French Canadian groups established in the United States took full part in this emerging intellectual solidarity. Indeed, grouped in communities, they established shared institutions, parishes, churches, newspapers and schools, maintaining a dynamic and militant patriotism. These strengthened the notion of a French Canada whose borders extended far beyond those of the province of Quebec, stretching instead across the entire North American subcontinent. From this perspective, Quebec appeared to be a motherland because its political institutions and legal system, more developed within a provincial jurisdiction than in a minority setting, gave community life an intensity and scope that it could not have in the “outposts” (Silver 1982). French Canada was thus a socio-cultural unit rather than a political one; it was, early 20th century interpreters contended, an organic unit whose body extended wherever there was a viable grouping of French Canadians (Bock 2004).

As a whole, French Canada was a sort of “Nation-Church” rather than a nation state since the Catholic Church, not the Quebec provincial state (and even less so the Canadian federal state) truly integrated and embraced the French Canadians or provided them with social institutions.

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13 The opening up of the West brought about, along with many other migrants, French Canadians who settled down in what would become, in 1905, the provinces of Saskatchewan and Alberta.
14 It must be noted that this state condition of the Church was only possible insofar as the economic laissez-faire doctrine, established during the 1840s, prevented any state involvement in the social sphere. In an entirely liberal and capitalist environment, the state did not feel any social responsibilities and left plenty of room for the Church’s social involvement. For its part, the Church always dreaded, and tried to deflect as much as possible, government “interference” in education and its numerous welfare services, while at the same time, as we have seen, it requested state promotion and state subsidies in the areas of agriculture and colonization (Ryan 1966)
The marginalization of French Canada

Two events helped to upset the complex structural balance of authority in the French Canadian Catholic Church, and in French Canadian society. The first was a demographic one. The coming of Irish immigrants, especially from 1847 on, considerably altered, in the long run, the relationship between the Canadian Church and Rome. Secondly, the English Canadian majority was swayed by the new spirit of imperialism coming from London from approximately the 1880s until the 1920s. This troubled the mutual adjustment and compromises reached between French-speaking and English-speaking Canadians and also modified the French Canadian perception of the British Empire. In the end, the French Canadian Church found itself demoted and tossed aside; from the initial and leading force of the whole Canadian Church, it was reduced to a mere provincial, or local, chapter. Likewise the French Canadians were progressively marginalized in the whole country as the nation-building process took shape, paradoxically incorporated in the (English) Canadian imperial ambition.

The immigration tide only began between 1815 and 1851 when around one million British incomers disembarked in the Maritimes and in Quebec ports. During the year of the Irish potato famine (1847), over 100,000 people left behind food scarcity and misery by fleeing to the British colonies and the United States (Rudin 1985). Some Irish minority groups established themselves in the cities of Quebec and Montreal; they soon petitioned the Pope for ethnically defined parishes instead of the bilingual parishes created by Bishop Bourget a few years earlier in an attempt to integrate the Irish minority into French Canadian society. The Vatican finally acquiesced to the petitioners’ request and St. Patrick’s Catholic Church acquired the status of a parish church for all English-speaking Catholics, in Quebec City in 1856, and in Montreal in 1873 (Rudin 1985:113).

Separate parishes were only one of the Irish special requests, Irish sees with English-speaking bishops being another. In fact, Ontario Catholicism became distinctively Irish in character with the nomination of J. Lynch as Bishop of Toronto in 1860 (Perin 1993:26). Within a decade, Lynch obtained from Rome the creation of the

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15 A part from the coming of the Loyalists
ecclesiastical province of Toronto so to bring together the English-speaking bishops of Kingston, Hamilton, London and Toronto; Lynch himself was designated archbishop in 1870 (Ferretti 1999). The prelate was not very well aware of Canadian affairs\(^{16}\) and, more surprisingly, did not even show much concern about Catholic rights in Canada. More interested in doing the bidding of the Anglo-Ontarian high society, he simply failed, on many crucial occasions, to stand with the French-Canadian episcopate (Perin 1993: 28 ff.). For instance, he refused to sign the petition to the Governor General asking for Riel’s amnesty; he gave only lukewarm support to the Catholic schools of New Brunswick, and did not assist the Catholics in any way during the Manitoba School Crisis (see below). Though the major Canadian ecclesiastical provinces were still under the jurisdiction of the Archbishop of Quebec, Lynch never acknowledged the precedence of the French Canadian hierarchy. Having little or no confidence in Canadian Catholic training, which was supervised by the Quebec theological seminary, he recruited his bishops directly from Ireland rather than locally.

It would seem that an ideological element explained the aloofness of Archbishop Lynch and his colleagues. Like their American counterparts, they were convinced that the Irish people had received a God-given mission to fulfill on earth. Now this belief was only apparently similar to French Canadian convictions; in fact, it directly confronted them. Contrary to the French-Canadian evangelizing mission, the Irish model had an assimilation twist. It involved blending with the dominant culture because it sought to convert the Protestant majority. The strategy, then, was to downplay, rather than highlight, cultural differences between Catholics and Protestants. From this perspective, the French Canadian attachment to their language was a hindrance to North American Catholic proselytising, and the nationalism professed by the French clergy was nothing more than the expression of their short-sightedness and backwardness. It only served, in Lynch’s opinion, to stir the mistrust of the Protestant majority (Perin 1993).

The long-term impact of the Irish influence within the Canadian Catholic Church was to eclipse that of the French Canadian hierarchy whose capabilities and power were

\(^{16}\) Born and trained in Ireland, he had spent 14 years in the United States before migrating to Canada.
progressively confined to the province of Quebec. Up until then, the advancement of Catholic numbers and strength totally hinged on French Canadian growth and vocations. As the Church took it upon itself to protect the French Canadian nation, the latter reciprocally played a cardinal role in upholding the Church’s prestige and weight. The Catholic Church and the French Canadian nation lived in symbiosis. The coming of a substantial numbers of Irish Catholics, who shared anti-French attitudes with the English Canadian majority and moreover sympathized with their imperialist mood, modified this relationship. The organic link between the French language and the Catholic faith, assumed by the French Canadian clergy, was henceforth challenged, and even denied. The lost battles for confessional and separate schools in the English-speaking provinces indicated the new and future powerlessness of the French Canadian clergy, and more generally, the frailty of French Canada’s place in Confederation. In fact, it seemed very clear from the day Louis Riel was hanged in 1885 that the English-speaking majority – including the Irish Catholics – was not at all willing to “tolerate” French Canadians outside the provincial reserve of Quebec. This plainly modified the French Canadian perception of the British Empire.

Up until then the Empire’s presence in the world was indeed well perceived by the Quebec press, which made associations with the great civilizing deeds of the Christian West. The kindness of England towards Catholicism was even a frequent subject in newspapers, which pointed out the “good relations between Victoria and Pius IX.” The Empire itself was seen as a collection of various peoples working together to push back the anarchy and immorality of the African and Asian worlds (Silver 1981:68ff). But at the end of the 19th century London’s foreign policy became more aggressive, propelled by the new imperialism that followed the decades of Whiggism. A blind belief was propagated according to which the global extension of British supremacy went hand in hand with the “superiority” of the Anglo-Saxon race. From then on, the French Canadian press presented the Empire as a monstrous machine crushing “foreign races.” The Empire’s ethno-cultural diversity indeed became problematic, for the goals of assimilation were overtly stated (Porterfield 1983:19). In Canada, the imperialist fever led many to attack French and Catholic institutions – indicating a close connection
between English culture and the Empire. On the whole, the imperial ambition played an integrating role amongst Canadians to the exclusion of French-speaking ones. To their astonishment and anger, the latter were treated as a “foreign race” in their own country and were asked to assimilate into the majority (Lacombe 2002).

In 1896, when Prime Minister W. Laurier refused to use federal power to re-establish the Franco-Manitobans’ right to separate schools, he simply proved that Section 93 of the Constitution was a dead letter. Moreover, once and for all he put to rest the possibility that the federal government might promote a higher principle encompassing the interests of both linguistic communities, and instead became an agent for the (English-speaking) majority (Silver 1997; Romney 1999). The idea of a bicultural and bilingual Canada was thus greatly undermined, if not demolished, by federal inaction. And the same pattern was repeated elsewhere in the Dominion during the following decades. Franco-Catholic expectations\(^\text{17}\) were disappointed time and time again, as provincial governments abandoned religious, and then French-language, schooling (Meisel and al. 1999: 65-105). The French Canadian clergy, for whom language and faith were indissoluble, were not able to impose their views on the politicians in power who were more prone to listen to the majority voice. More dramatically, the French Canadian clergy were no longer able to promote their vision of Catholic evangelism on the continent among representatives of the Vatican bureaucracy. Indeed, Rome never lost of sight England’s domination of Canada, on the one hand, and bore in mind the demographic growth and economic power of the American church, on the other. The apostolic delegates that it sent to Canada were thus products of the Empire or friendly to its cause\(^\text{18}\). Convinced of the central role the Canadian church had to play in converting the North American subcontinent, Rome forgot that the very large majority of Catholics in Canada were French-speaking\(^\text{19}\) and wished to see the Canadian church convert the

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\(^{17}\) in the newly formed provinces of Saskatchewan and Alberta (1905), and then, in 1912, in Ontario

\(^{18}\) Archbishop Conroy was Irish and hostile to all nationalism; R. Merry del Val, a Spanish prelate, grew up and studied in England. See R. Perin, 1993, chap. 4 and 5.

\(^{19}\) The French-Canadian birth rate was higher that that of any other Canadian group and they migrated a lot outside of the province of Quebec, not only to the United States but also towards the Canadian western regions as well. Between 1871 and 1901 among the Catholics of Ontario, for instance, the number of English-speaking was constant while that of the French-speaking almost doubled (Perin: page 31). French Canadian missionaries had first evangelized the West and founded French Catholics communities and
English masses. This explains why it named Irish rather than French Canadian bishops to dioceses outside Quebec, no matter what language was spoken by the faithful. Not only were these bishops unaware of the history of the battles for the rights of Catholics in Canada, but they were also hostile to the French cause. According to them, Canada was a mono-cultural country, moreover part of the British Empire, and the future of the Canadian Church entirely lay with English-speaking Catholics. The French Canadian clergy, who promoted a bicultural vision of the country, was then in a difficult position, preaching respect for authority, on the one hand, and surreptitiously opposing Rome’s policies, on the other.

Thanks to Laurier’s skilful diplomacy, the marginalization of the French Canadian episcopate was paradoxically institutionalized with the establishment of a Roman Permanent Delegation in 1899. Officially, the delegate was on hand to supervise the ecclesiastical administration of the country, but clever observers noticed that his very presence was a sort of reprimand for past agitation on the schools question, more or less orchestrated by the French Canadian clergy. And the latter they, for a long while, saw in the Delegation an instrument of Anglicization (Hamelin and Gagnon 1984: 59ff).

*Nationalist renewal and the cherished French language*

The 20th century witnessed a renewal of nationalist thinking, which flourished outside the Catholic Church. A new generation of leaders came to the forefront of the nationalist movement, fundamentally challenging the church’s role as spokesperson and some of its ideological precepts and axioms. A *Ligue nationaliste* was founded in 1913 by a group of talented young men who wished to influence public opinion without resorting to the political parties, which they haughtily despised. For these young lions, national sentiment was only marginally connected to the Catholic religion; it was instead firmly rooted in the worship of France and French culture. That same year, a *Ligue des droits du français* was launched to protect, and especially to try to restore, the rights of institutions. With the 20th century, English speaking migrants from Ontario and the Maritime provinces, and important contingents of Ukrainians, Germans, Polish and Hungarians changed the face of Western Catholicism. From then on, English-speaking bishops and priests replaced their French-speaking counterparts (Fay 2002: 186ff.)
the French language in the English provinces, notably Ontario where “Ruling XVII” had shut down bilingual education and imposed teaching in English only. Very slowly but nonetheless surely, the French language was becoming the dearest value for French Canada’s educated youth. Later, with the crusade of Canon Groulx, the famous motto “the language, guardian of the faith” would even be reversed, with the Catholic faith being seen as the safeguard of the (French Canadian) culture (Gagnon and Hamelin 1984). However minor this change seemed to be, it nonetheless initiated the drift towards putting religion at the service of ethnicity.

The new nationalist school tended to lean towards the anti-imperialist movement and to leave aside the religious question. The outbreak of the First World War tested both the fragile unanimity of the clergy and the symbiotic relationship between the Church and the French Canadian people. Sticking to its long tradition of loyalty, the Quebec hierarchy, under the leadership of Montreal’s Archbishop Bruchési, officially gave its support to the government’s war policy. Some members of the clergy even spoke of a French Canadian moral duty to enlist in the imperial forces: since England had protected their faith and freedom, it was only fair that French Canadians join in the war effort. The collective letter greatly displeased nationalist circles. Even a fervent Catholic politician like H. Bourassa publicly lamented the Church’s position, and without undermining the institution itself, still alerted French Canadians to the fact that they were not at all bound to serve. Other nationalists were less restrained, complaining that the Bishops simply showed too much subservience to the government and that, in all events, their opinion was not more worthwhile than that of any other citizen, and probably even less so since they were constrained by their function. Accusations of misleading French Canadians into acquiescing to imperial policies did not stop the hierarchy from issuing another recommendation, in 1917, this time asking French Canadians to collaborate with the special Commission of National Service. The Catholic clergy was dramatically divided on this question, as were French Canadian Catholics in general. When conscription was

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20 O. Asselin, “Petit playdoyer pour la liberté de pensée du Bas Clergé et des laïques catholiques en matière politique” in L’Action, 1915, excerpts are reproduced in Gagnon and Hamelin, op.cit., 302-304.

21 Not all bishops had signed the letter and many priests refused to read it aloud like they were supposed to, or just mumbled it (idem., 305).
finally imposed, a few months later, the Episcopal Assembly felt betrayed and joined the French Canadian press in condemning the measure.

This explosive episode undermined the prestige of the Quebec Catholic hierarchy but was not yet a harbinger of the Church’s decline, which would only take place after the Second World War. Nevertheless, the high clergy’s unequivocal support of the war effort, repeated in the 1940s, sowed, for many, seeds of doubt as to the role and involvement of the Catholic Church in the defence of French Canadian interests. In other respects, many intellectuals began to see the state of Quebec as the only real means of protecting the rights and aspirations of French Canadians. Symptomatic of what would happen in the 1960s, a desertion of the federal state would be coupled with disillusionment vis-à-vis the Church, thus paving the way for the Quebec provincial state to play the part of a national state.

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