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Servitude de l'Église Catholique: a Reconsideration

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Some years ago, at a meeting of the Canadian Historical Association, a paper was given by Professor Marcel Trudel, who is the authority on the post-conquest history of the Canadian church. The paper bore the title *Servitude de l'Église Catholique* and it concludes, " To see the church toward the end of the 19th century adequately staffed with able people, extremely vigorous in its religious programme, a powerful force in society, politically aggressive, it is hard to imagine that from the conquest until 1840 it had been deprived of everything, condemned to stagnation, ceaselessly humiliated by the government; and it may be forgotten that at times its very existence was threatened."[1]

Professor Trudel shows that since 1763 effectively the British government had nominated the bishop and his coadjutor; that occasional claims had been made to control the nomination of priests to parishes; that priests had been required to act in some ways as channels of communication between the government and people; that opposition had been made to the creation of a hierarchy and to the multiplication of bishops through the division of the vast diocese of Quebec; and finally that the government had endeavoured to win the church as an important support and servant of the state through favours to the bishop: an increasing salary, a seat in the legislative council, and the offer of a place on the executive council. And in all this the first Bishop, Briand, and several of his successors, connived at the servitude.

The implication of rigour on the part of Great Britain and of weakness if not sycophancy on the part of Bishop Briand is credible enough, given the modern assumption that every self-constituted group within the state owning a common confession of faith has a natural right to exist, independently of other groups, protected (and even indirectly subsidized) by the state and supported by the voluntary obedience and voluntary contributions of its members.

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[1] M. Trudel, *Servitude de l'Eglise Catholique,* Report of the Canadian Historical Association, 1963.

Even as late as 1760, however, there was no such assumption in Britain, still less in France, or even in the highly individualist American colonies. The accepted arrangement was the state church of the majority with considerable accumulated endowments and privileges. It had a monopoly of such essential social services as marriage and it enjoyed extensive legal and judicial powers over property and taxation.

Britain and France had accepted such a church as an essential aspect of society. Other cults, insofar as they were tolerated, were socially despised if not severely oppressed. There was not much difference in church-state relations between the two countries except that in Britain the church, owing nothing to Rome, might be rather more independent, and the state more tolerant. Each country had a profound political suspicion of its own religious minority which happened to correspond to the religious majority of the other. Protestants in France, and Roman Catholics in Britain, were considered a danger to the unity of the state.

It is against this background, rather than against the assumptions of twentieth-century voluntarism flourishing in the midst of more or less charitable agnosticism, that the situation of the church of New France after 1760 must be judged. It was linked with Rome, but until now chiefly through its connection with the Gallican church of France. It had been the protégé of the French government and an object of generosity for many of the faithful in France who had given freely to the missions which extended from Acadia west to the Great Lakes and south to the Mississippi. In addition to its yearly revenues from France the church held *en seigneurie* large and potentially valuable tracts of land.[2] An integral part of society and government, the church had a complete monopoly of religious worship. There were a few protestants in the colony, but no protestant worship in public.

In the Canadian church after 1760 no one can be surprised that Britain imposed, in exchange for a large measure of protection and patronage, some degree of subjection.[3] The church had, after all, been subject to a good deal of authority from the King of France. The remarkable fact is that, in spite of threats and dangers, the church did receive steady protection, a small measure of financial support, and government sanction if not for tithes, certainly for levies in support of church building even before the Quebec Act. One can even argue that church-state relations in Quebec, in the generation after the

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[2] Estimated at well over 2,000,000 *arpents,* nearly two-sevenths of all lands granted in New France. Roy C. Dalton, *The Jesuit Estates Question 1760-88,* p. 60. University of Toronto Press, 1968.

[3] For the official attitude to the church, Articles of Capitulation (1760), Arts. XXVII-XXXV, Treaty of Paris 1763, Art. IV. Egremont to Murray, August 13, 1763, all printed in A. Shortt and A. Doughty, *Documents relating to the Constitutional History of Canada,* King's Printer, 1918.

conquest, offer on the whole an example of moderation and toleration more creditable to politicians and to priests than the stormy politico-religious contests of the late nineteenth century.[4]

I do not think that Professor Trudel would disagree with this thesis. My purpose is merely to write a gloss on his essay by giving some details on the period immediately following the conquest, which may give a somewhat fuller and more genial meaning to that harsh word, servitude.

One special aspect of the post-conquest situation to which I wish to give attention is that survival was threatened by forces within as well as without. The Canadian church had internal troubles which could have been far more serious than those which actually did result from the limitations put by the British government on its pledge of freedom of worship. It may even be argued that these troubles were *averted* to a considerable extent by the policy of the British government and even by one act of Governor Murray, which is particularly noted by Professor Trudel, the arbitrary rejection of Montgolfier and the selection as Bishop of Quebec of Jean Olivier Briand. Briand, a Breton from France, had been the secretary and intimate friend of the man who was bishop in 1759, another Breton, Henri-Marie Dubreuil de Pontbriand. Among the surrounding Normans, these two Bretons were allies as well as friends. "On the oath of a good Breton I swear – insofar as it is allowed to a bishop to swear – [your letters] give me much pleasure,'[5] wrote Pontbriand to Briand near the end of his life. Pontbriand died in Montreal, the British occupying Quebec, in June 1760. The province was yielded in September. Briand, in addition to his duties as the Bishop's secretary, served also as President of the Chapter and Grand Vicar of Quebec. There were other Grand Vicars at Three Rivers and Montreal, but Briand gained a certain prestige from his place in Quebec and his association with the Chapter. He succeeded in winning the favour of General Murray, military governor of the District of Quebec from 1760, and from August 1764 Governor of the whole province. Briand had persuaded Murray that the bare toleration granted in 1760 was not enough. The church must have a bishop to ordain priests, to attend to discipline, to deal with innumerable matters of administration.

Briand did not want the position himself; he was nervous, timid, a bad preacher, perhaps not intellectually brilliant.[6] He was, however, pious, sincere

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4 For an early and optimistic view, Archives de l'Archevêché de Québec (hereafter cited as A.A.Q.), Correspondance Manuscrite de Rome, I, 19, Cardinal Castelli to l'Abbé de l''Isle-Dieu, December 17, 1960.

5 A.A.Q. *Evêques de Québec* VI, 6.

6 A.A.Q. *Gouvernement* I, 2, 3, 8, 11, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17; V, 19; *Evêques de Québec* I, 103, *Pères Jésuites* I, 1; *Copies des Lettres* III, 216; Collège Ste. Marie (Montreal), Briand to Pontbriand Sisters, February 12, 1765.

and intensely loyal to the church. Having convinced himself that the church could not possibly survive under the British unless it dispelled natural suspicion by firm and sincere support of the new rulers, he was also staunchly loyal to the British state. Murray accepted this situation. He hoped the Canadians would eventually become Protestant. Meanwhile the easiest way to manage them, and to prevent intrigues with France was to put a man like Briand in charge. He convinced the British government, and then sent Briand off to England. It was made clear to Briand that he was not to be a "Bishop." In the eyes of the British government a bishop, by definition, was a Bishop of the church of England. According to custom, British colonies not forming part of an overseas diocese automatically came under the jurisdiction of the Bishop of London. Briand would be "Superintendent of the Romish Church in Quebec." On that understanding he could go to France and (very privately) receive any consecration from French Bishops that might enable him to ordain priests. Briand accordingly crossed the Channel, was consecrated Bishop at Suresnes by virtue of bulls from Rome, and reappeared in Quebec in June 1766 just as Murray was leaving. He was welcomed with tears of joy by the populace, and as Bishop, of course. What did Canadians know of a Superintendent, or even of "The Romish religion"?[7]

Carleton, Murray's successor, arrived at Quebec a few months after Briand. Though differing from Murray in many ways he agreed with him in liking and esteeming Briand. Carleton was Anglo-Irish, a Protestant, but certainly not without Roman Catholic sympathies. His wife, educated in Versailles, may have had even warmer feelings. One Bailly de Messein, a Roman Catholic priest, a prominent Canadian churchman who eventually became coadjutor to the Bishop, was tutor to their sons in later years. The Carletons clearly had no interest in Superintendents of Religion. Under Carleton, Briand was Bishop. He wore in public his purple soutane and gold cross, and was universally addressed as "Monseigneur." Moreover, Carleton, cautiously at first, then with confidence, allowed him very full authority in the church, as complete, if not more so, he said, than he would have had under the rule of France.[8]

In 1768 Carleton, who had been sent out as Lieutenant-Governor, succeeded Murray as Governor. From then until 1770 he was preparing to return to London to inspire the Quebec Act. It was intended to settle the "Quebec problem" with Canadian civil law and the formal acceptance of the

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[7] A.A.Q. *Gouvernement* I, 16; V, 19, 25. For a detailed account of the question of a Canadian bishop, M. Trudel, *L'Eglise Canadienne sous le Régime Militaire*, Vol. I, pp. 195-304.

[8] A.A.Q. *Gouvernement* I, 17, 18, 19, 23, *Evéques de Québec*, 132; *Copies des Lettres III*, 561, IV, 283.

Roman communion, placing the habitant under his priest and seigneur on the understanding that priest and seigneur could and would retain him in loyal obedience to Britain.

But although the Act conceded almost everything that would keep Quebec French, the instructions made large concessions to the English-speaking merchants, and to an Erastian policy which would certainly be unwelcome to the Canadian church now, of necessity, increasingly ultramontane in tone. The Bishop might ordain priests, but in theory he could do little else without official permission. The Governor was to nominate the curés, to protect priests who chose to marry, and to regulate, with the advice of the Council, the seminaries of Quebec and Montreal.[9]

There is evidence that these instructions represent the official policy of Britain for much of the period. Here, however, the situation becomes complicated. From this time until the ultimate Catholic Emancipation in 1829 the aristocratic rulers of Britain were more tolerant than the general public. It is possible that these instructions were for the record, to be implemented only as the needs of the moment might dictate.[10]

There is no doubt that had they been followed literally the situation of the church would have been one of servility and degrading servitude. In fact, the policy already initiated in the colony anticipated the concessions of the Act rather than the restrictions of the instructions. And Carleton apparently had not the slightest intention of obeying the instructions and he never did so. He even informed his superiors that, although he did not object to "suggestions," he believed that "the important matter of religion" should be left to his discretion.[11] Thus although Briand undoubtedly knew something of the instructions and feared their effect, in fact during eighteen years as official "Superintendent" he was given complete support as Bishop. His correspondence with Paris and Rome, not officially recognized, was not prevented.

Briand was also given a small salary (for he had no regular income). An informal allowance had been instituted by Murray. The Quebec Act authorized priests to levy tithes; the instructions provided an allowance of £200 for the Superintendent of the Roman religion.[12] It would have been inconsistent to

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[9] Shortt and Doughty, *op. cit.,* 602.606. For evidence that, in some quarters, the instructions on religion were expected to be taken seriously, P.A.C. M.G. 23 A1(1) (Dartmouth Papers), Vol. VI, 2351, 2361, 2362.

[10] *Ibid.,* 2330.

[11] *Ibid.*

[12] Shortt and Doughty, *op. cit.,* 613. Briand referred frequently to his poverty and dependence on the Seminary. Until 1775 his income was small, dependent on the proceeds of some episcopal lands (A.A.Q. *Gouvernement* 38)

support the priests and not their ecclesiastical superior. Altogether Britain pursued a tortuous kind of policy, half hostile, half paternal.

The fact is, however, that the Canadians themselves were infinitely more tortuous than the British government, more unpredictable, more divided among themselves. It may be true to say that they wanted their church, but "church" meant different things to different Canadians. They certainly did not all want the same kind of church. The old French colony had seen plenty of quarrelling over ecclesiastical and moral affairs. It would be strange if ecclesiastical peace could come in with the British. On the contrary, judging from the copious notes of Briand's correspondence, the years of his administration, and especially the years from the conquest to the Quebec Act, were years of constant strife, confusion, doubt and even despair. It was not Briand's relations with the heretic English that gave him trouble or constituted the chief threat to the integrity of the church.[13] It was his dealings with the Canadians, his co-religionists, his flock. He had to battle his way to some clear understanding and definition of his place in the organization of the church, of his relations to the priests and of his control over the habitants. We have, for the most part, only Briand's account of the battle. Even allowing for some natural prejudice, he does give a plausible picture of the perplexity and strife in the church throughout the province and also of the motley collection of people who occupied the pews.[14]

The church at the conquest was a complex organism reflecting not only the variety of bodies in the mother church of France, but also certain special circumstances in the history of the colony.[15] The priests of the hundred and twenty parishes in the three districts of Quebec, Three Rivers and Montreal were chiefly but not entirely Canadian.. They had been working directly under the supervision of the bishop and of his grand vicars, one for each district. The bishop was, in theory, supported and advised by his Chapter. At the conquest a number of the members of the Chapter were in France, and the

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and on some funds from France. *Ibid.,* 19. *Copies des Lettres* III, 239; IV, 283, Collège Ste. Marie (Montreal), MS. Catherine Briand, June 26, 1768.

13 A.A.Q. *Evéques de Québec* 1, 113. *Copies des Lettres* III, 533.

14 For examples A.A.Q. *Copies des Lettres* IV, 249 and V, 69 refer to habitants of Lotbinière telling Briand that they can dispense with their unpopular priest and say the divine office for themselves – a threat not to be taken very seriously but suggesting a natural independence of mind and ideas (probably) borrowed from the American colonies. See also *Evéques de Québec* I, 114; VI, 13. *Copies des Lettres* III, 437, 451, 503, 595, 598, 599; IV, 179, 195. P.A.C. Transcripts, Archives de l'Archevêché de Montréal (hereafter cited as A.A.M.), Montgolfier to Briand, January 20, 1771.

15 For a detailed analysis of the institutions of the church, see Trudel: *L'Eglise Canadienne* ... cited above.

constitution and authority of the Chapter were not recognized by the British. Briand regretted this, no doubt suspecting, with cause, that implicit in the official policy of Britain was the intention of attacking the corporate existence of the church and of reducing him to the status of a mere government agent.[16]

Two other organizations of particular importance under the French régime stood somewhat apart from the bishop and chapter, and the parish priests. The Seminary of Quebec, representing the Paris Society for Foreign Missions, had as its function the training of priests. Bishop Laval had thought of maintaining all priests as itinerant missionaries and members of the Seminary. The policy of fixing them in parishes had been preferred, but not all had tenure in 1760. The Seminary had its own property and its own officials, apart from the bishop and his Chapter.

In Montreal was another and different Seminary, a community of secular priests, a branch of the Sulpicians of Paris. At the conquest the Sulpicians in Paris acted very quickly, transferring all Canadian titles to the "gentlemen of St. Sulpice" in Montreal, lest they be confiscated as belonging to enemy aliens. The Montreal Seminary was not so much a missionary training school as a mission station. Its members served the parishes in the city, on the two islands, and in the surrounding area. Like the members of the Quebec Seminary, they were Frenchmen. They were a relatively wealthy order, intelligent, educated, even sophisticated.

The district of Montreal was more populous, less ravaged by war and more fertile than Quebec. Although the seat of government in church and state was in Quebec, Montreal, especially early in the post-conquest period, offered charity to its poor neighbours down river. Smaller, less wealthy and altogether less important than either Quebec or Montreal was the district of Three Rivers, engaging moderately in fur-trading, more in ship-building, and fishing and even iron-mining and, casually, also in the growing of melons. Three Rivers, somewhat despised as wanting in civilization and culture, responded appropriately with a good deal of turbulent and refractory behaviour.

It was over this community that Briand came in 1766 to preside as bishop. No doubt he had expected problems, and especially from the British, but he can hardly have expected all the trouble prepared for him by his co-religionists, now his spiritual children. He knew, of course, that his situation was a strange one. No bishop under the British could look to France for direction. He must look to Rome. For this reason the British, repudiating a Roman Catholic bishop, had suggested a grand vicar with power to ordain priests. For a similar reason and with a different motive, the Pope had been inclined to accept this. A bishop under protestant rule could be too

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[16] A.A.Q. *Copies des Lettres* III, 161.

independent of Rome. But this very fact enabled some of the Canadian churchmen in Paris, working for the Canadian church, to persuade Britain that episcopal powers would be preferable because they would make the Superintendent of the Romish church less dependent on Rome. Britain agreed and therefore Briand, Murray's choice, was accepted by Rome as a bishop, even though the British government did not officially recognize the title.

Meanwhile similar, indeed parallel, reasoning had been going on in the colony. Canadian churchmen were individualists and loved their independence. They were not sure if they wanted a bishop from whose spiritual decrees there could now be no easy appeal to anyone, not to France, nor to Britain's heretic governor, and to Rome only by devious and dangerous routes. And so some Canadian clergy also had favoured the plan of a grand vicar – one among a number of grand vicars whose only special mark of distinction would be that he had powers of ordination. Thus, while the secular public rejoiced at the arrival of their "bishop" in 1766, some members of the clergy and especially in Quebec shook their heads and decided to wait and see how matters would go on.[17]

They perhaps had expected to maintain, even with a bishop, much independence of action. Briand was not expected to give much trouble. The clergy in Quebec had known him as the rather self-effacing secretary of the Bishop, timid in public, but in private excellent company, good-looking, genial and friendly. It was true that during the military régime he had been firm with the parish priests who quarrelled, or complained about officers, billeted in their presbyteries or made interest with Murray to get better parishes. He had even as grand vicar undertaken to offer an exhortation which could be taken as a rebuke to his friend C. S. Pressart, the Superior of the Seminary, apparently for some acts of self-will and imprudence. But now he was not expected to be difficult. With little or no regular income, dependent on the Seminary of Quebec for board and lodging, he was for many years, as he said, poorer than most of the clergy in Quebec.[18]

Meanwhile, during Briand's absence, all the local pretensions of ecclesiastical parties and the ambitions of young and energetic men emerged and contributed to the formation of what must be called an anti-episcopal party. The chief members of this party were, first, the parish priest of Quebec, Jean Félix Récher, a relatively young man not yet forty when Briand returned as bishop. Récher, besides being parish priest, was an honorary canon and

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17 A.A.Q. *Gouvernement*, V, 21; *Evéques de Québec*, I, 46.

18 A.A.Q. *Copies des Lettres* III, 431. A project to raise funds for the bishop by a levy on the parish priests was opposed by Montgolfier, who believed that the Seminaries alone should be responsible. A.A.M. Montgolfier to Briand, July 30, 1766; A.A.Q. *Gouvernement* V, 38.

therefore connected with the Chapter, and also a member of the Seminary. He lived in the Seminary and so was able to build up close associations with the three other members of this party: Pressart, who had once been Superior of the Seminary, Henri François Gravé, a "good patriot" who believed that Briand was much too co-operative with the hated English, and an older man, Mathurin Joseph Jacrau, a trained lawyer, who was regarded naturally as an authority on ecclesiastical matters.[19] Briand had also acquired some "private" enemies during his period as grand vicar, for example the priest Louis de Lotbinière.

It is not likely that these men realized at all what was going on in Briand's mind during the nearly two years of his absence in England and in France (1764-66). He seems to have been deciding at this time that the revolution of the conquest had made the survival of the Canadian church possible only if the old ecclesiastical liberties, familiar, easy and pleasant in the days of France, were wiped out, or at least much reduced. Britain was threatening to dissolve altogether the two male orders of the Jesuits and the Recollets, and to grant the Seminaries the barest toleration. The property of the Montreal Seminary was even in danger of confiscation in spite of the action of the Sulpicians in Paris. Briand believed that the only way to safety was to reconstitute the Seminaries as well as the parishes under the direct authority of the bishop. Their property would then be accepted as ordinary civil property, peaceful possession of which had been promised by the Articles of Capitulation in 1760. Briand would be answerable for the conduct of the Seminaries to the British government and also to Rome. But he could achieve this diplomatic miracle of reconciling the authorities of London and Rome only if the church fully accepted his personal authority. He knew he would have some trouble, but he was utterly convinced that the preservation of the church depended on the integrity of the bishop's authority and that the integrity of the episcopal authority depended on him, weak and inadequate as he felt himself to be.[20]

And so Canada's Thomas à Becket, now some 51 years of age, returned from abroad in 1766. He was not visibly altered from his former friendly genial self, but inwardly he had become transformed into a prelate so insistent on his authority that his opponents were soon expending themselves in epithets – proud, distant, haughty, imperious, ambitious, choleric and passionate, a protestant, destructive of religion, and a "'chien de breton entêté."[21] For seven or eight years Briand rode out this storm, defending himself against these general, and other more specific, charges by asserting

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[19] A.A.Q. *Copies des Lettres* III, 238, 361, IV; 191, 349. P.A.C. M.G. 23, A, 1, 1. (Dartmouth Papers) IV, 2374.

[20] A.A.Q. *Copies des Lettres* III, 354, 405.

[21] *Ibid.,* III, 406; IV, 128.

with evident sincerity and probable truth the diligence and simplicity of his life.[22]

As with Becket and Henry II the chief bone of contention in the City of Quebec was a matter of joint ecclesiastical authority involving the control of property. The parish church of Quebec, situated at the top of Côte de la Montagne and destroyed during the siege of 1759, was rebuilt in the years following the cession. This was achieved through the energy of the young priest Récher and of the church wardens who shared with him the responsibility for maintaining the property and the records of the church. The legal position of this particular church, however, was ambiguous. In all other parish churches the priest would be appointed by the bishop and would then, with the wardens, control the church building according to ecclesiastical law, as interpreted by the bishop. However, from early times, the Seminary which had existed before Quebec had a bishop, had nominated the priest of the parish of Quebec. Moreover when Laval had been given his full title as Bishop of Quebec and therefore required a cathedral church, he had secured some special relation to the only available church, the parish church, but had not secured the right of himself with his Chapter to exercise complete control over the building as his own cathedral.[23]

During Briand's absence in England and France (1764-76) Récher and the wardens had determined to end the ambiguity of this triple association of Bishop, Seminary and Parish, and to claim complete control of the church as the church of the parish.[24] Briand, meanwhile, had determined on his part to insist that he, and the Chapter he hoped to confirm in its authority, would have full control over the building as the cathedral church, the centre of order and discipline for the diocese, and the seat from which, as he also hoped, priests could be established in permanent tenure of their parishes.

The fact of these two completely opposing views appeared soon after Briand's return to Quebec. He learned that, although many of the public sided with him, he could by no means command a majority.[25] He thought momentarily of a lawsuit with the priest and the wardens but dismissed the idea as undignified and risky. Determined to avoid the scandal of an open quarrel, he waited on events. He became increasingly aware of the strength of the anti-episcopal party. At first he seems to have believed that the two Seminaries were also in league against his authority, but there seems to have been no foundation for this view.[26] Montgolfier addressed him from Montreal

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22 *Ibid.,* IV, 128, 542.

23 *Ibid.*

24 *Ibid.*

25 *Ibid.*, IV, 209. 25

26 *Ibid.*, 111, 353. 26

in terms of the greatest respect. Whereas before he had deferred to Briand as grand vicar of Quebec, sometimes unwillingly, now he accorded him cordial and ready obedience and co-operation as bishop. He said little about the Quebec quarrel, but offered him sympathy. He even hinted, as matters grew difficult, that the Seminary in Montreal would co-operate in supporting the bishop, and urged Briand to take up his residence there at any time. He also sent down pears from the Seminary orchards in token of his friendship.[27]

Briand needed any consolation that pears could give. He had a room in the Quebec Seminary and a study and a tiny chapel. There he was attended according to the custom of the day by his personal servant and assisted from time to time by a secretary who too often had to go off on other duties. When this happened Briand had to require his correspondents to make copies of his letters and send the originals back to him for his files. Years later the little chapel was decorated with the beautiful carved altar piece, with an olive tree as a motif, which is still one of the sights of the Quebec Seminary. But in those early days the rooms, like the company, must have been bleak enough.[28] Briand took his meals, naturally, with the priests. of the Seminary, that is with Récher, the parish priest, Pressart, Gravé, Jacrau and Boiret, now the Superior. All except Boiret appear to have opposed him at one time or another, although there is evidence that the strength and bitterness of the opposition varied from time to time. One may imagine, however, the discomfort of observing Récher bustling in and out of the Seminary reporting the progress of the building of his church, the restoration of the ornaments, the silver, the hangings, and the vestments which had been hidden during the siege and now were being taken out, the commissioning of silversmiths, wood carvers, gilders, and so on.

All this went on during 1767 and Briand knew that letters were passing about the diocese suggesting that, defeated on the parish church issue, he might accept Montgolfier's invitation and retreat from Quebec to the Montreal Seminary to establish his seat in that city. Of this he had no thought. It would have caused a loss of face with the British government and a loss of his valuable influence with the British governor.

Then in the spring of 1768, Récher, as Briand remarked, was called to the Lord to render his account, dying comparatively young at the age of 41.z[29] The members of the Seminary, moved themselves and perhaps touched at

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27 *Ibid*., III, 375.

28 A.A.M. Montgolfier to Briand, July 30, 1788, November 17, 1767, and a series of other letters from Montgolfier to Briand on church business at intervals dated between 1766 and 1775.

29 Collège Ste. Marie (Montreal), MS. of Catherine Briand, June 26, 1768; A.A.Q. *Copies des Lettres* III, 431.

Briand's grief (for in spite of his anger at his behaviour he did mourn Récher at the time as a former friend and a man of integrity), renounced their rights over the appointment of the parish priest and invited Briand to nominate a successor. They may have made a virtue of necessity. Priests were scarce and the income was low; perhaps because tithes, paid in wheat, would yield little in this city parish.[30]

This removal of the obstructing priest and the power of appointing his successor enabled Briand to take a stronger line than before with the church wardens of the Quebec parish. They, however, remained stubborn in their continued resistance to this authority. Briand exhorted them with energy if not always with tact. A letter survives which begins with prayer – a prayer three pages long – in which he explains to the Almighty in detail the ill-behaviour of the wardens. Thereafter he addresses them directly, demanding his full rights as Bishop with his Chapter, not only to appoint their priest, but to have an over-riding authority in all arrangements for church services and for the management of the property. There seems to have been a suggestion on the part of the wardens that the Bishop would use their revenues for purposes other than parish needs. This he denied; he was not seeking to increase his revenue but to define his authority and the constitution of the church. Without a cathedral he doubted his full powers as bishop.[31]

Early in 1771 a fresh crisis arose in Briand's relations with the Quebec parish. The church building was nearing completion and the wardens still refused to yield an inch in their contest with the bishop. One thing, however, they could not deny. The building must be consecrated, and by the bishop. But Briand had consistently refused even to enter the church unless it were recognized as *his* cathedral.

The building being nearly completed, therefore, the wardens sent a deputation under one Conefroy as spokesman. Conefroy urged Briand to conduct the consecration, assuring him that the wardens did respect his rights. He could attend church with his Chapter whenever he wished. "I answered him," said Briand, "thank you very much. So can the common hangman." On no account would he enter the church, although, even had it not been his cathedral church, he had a perfect right to go in whenever he chose and demand the best seat in the place. However, as a concession in this special situation, he would consent to consecrate a stone from the altar if the wardens cared to send it to him. It would then be lawful to say mass in the still unconsecrated building. And so, after what was apparently a lengthy and somewhat heated discussion, Briand, as he says, went off to say his own

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30 *Ibid,* III, 425; IV, 209, 535.

31 Appointment dated April 5, 1769. *Rapport des Archives de la Province de Québec,* 1929-1930, p. 79; A.A.Q. *Copies des Lettres* III, 425, 583, 607, 611.

mass, greatly disturbed, but insisting that he could still retain his affection even for the wayward Conefroy, formerly his good friend.[32]

Briand re-stated his case in a letter to the wardens and in another to the whole parish of Quebec. No doubt he hoped that public opinion might force the hand of the wardens, but no such result followed. The deadlock lasted for three years longer, during which Briand's opponents heard or professed to hear from friends in London, that an Anglican bishop was to come to the colony and that priests and nuns would be permitted to marry. The Roman Catholic bishop was to be reduced, they said, to "a mere cipher clothed in violet" and, if he endeavoured to overstep his powers, he could expect a prison for his palace or worse.[33] Briand guessed that these rumours came from a somewhat infamous protégé of General Murray, a former Jesuit, Roubaud, now in London, a professed protestant, but one whose morals did little credit to his newly adopted religion. While the unfortunate bishop tried to reassure the faithful on this matter, he was aware of attacks on his other flank in the shape of reports to Rome of his arrogance and intransigence, reports which he countered by sending his own story with due caution to Canadian colleagues in Paris and to Rome directly.[34]

Meanwhile Briand was absorbed in the work of the entire diocese. Nowhere did he meet the concerted opposition that he was finding in Quebec, but he had problems enough in the organization, administration and disciplining of his flock.

One continuing source of anxiety was the shortage of priests; it had never been possible to man the parishes with Canadian recruits, and now the supply from France was cut off. In one way this helped to establish Briand's authority. As bishop he claimed the right not only to give permission for the building of a church, but to have the final word on the site and the design.[35]

The siting of a church was always the subject of much discussion. Briand frequently used his powers of intervention here because he had to bear in mind not only the future extension of settlements away from the river front, but also the likelihood of one priest having to serve two churches in different parishes. It was natural, however, that the people of the parish should cling to the privilege of choosing their own site for their own church. They often disagreed

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32 *Ibid*., III, 369; IV, 75; A.A.M. Montgolfier to Briand, June 15, 1771.

33 *Ibid*., IV, 215. [Mistakenly numbered note "34" in the print edition; consequently all subsequent notes in the electronic edition of this article will be be numbered one digit lower than in the print edition.]

34 *Ibid*., IV, 349, 445, 535. See also IV, 128.

35 A.A.M. Montgolfier to Briand, March 5, 1772, June 21, 1771. He also claimed the right to determine, or to alter, the boundaries of parishes. A.A.G. *Gouvernement* I, 13, 50.

among themselves. They not infrequently disagreed with the bishop. The parish of Ste. Rose on the north side of the island of Montreal apparently began talking about a new church in 1766. In 1768 they were exploding into a violent quarrel with the bishop who, in view of the shortage of priests, wanted to redraw the boundaries of the parish and site the church accordingly. "The good Canadians," said Briand, "want to arrange church matters for themselves. They know everything about religion, more than the priests and the bishop. . . . You could go through the whole of Christendom and not find people more intractable or less religious. I am very much afraid that they deserve and will draw upon them the rejection by God mentioned in the Scriptures ..." and so on. This letter, addressed to the priest, was no doubt intended to be read to the offenders. If so it had not the desired effect. For a time Ste. Rose was placed under the most rigid of interdicts. "... We will not even allow baptism to be administered nor the dead to be buried in church or cemetery."[36] This order was circulated in seven neighbouring parishes and all priests receiving it were to sign a receipt and to obey the order on pain of deprivation of their own powers. The people of Ste. Rose, unrepentant, threatened to sue Briand, a threat which naturally brought forth further thunders against those who, like Jupiter, refused to submit themselves to God.

It is not certain how this particular phase of the struggle ended, or when the interdict was lifted. Briand may have had some help from his friend Governor Carleton, for he says, darkly, in one letter, "They are mistaken ... if they imagine they can bring me before the courts. I shall be listened to more than they, and matters will not get into the hands of lawyers ... I have more resources than they think. They needn't imagine that English liberty allows them to do anything."[37] No doubt some settlement must have been reached to end the interdict, but not until six years later, in 1774, does Briand remark that the poor misguided folk of Ste. Rose are beginning to come to their senses. They did not, however, complete their highly contentious church until 1788.[38]

For eight long years after his return to Quebec as bishop, Briand and his somewhat reluctant and rebellious flock between them sketched the shape of the new church in this new English- and protestant-ruled society. Although at no time could Briand have called all his priests models of vigour and virtue, or their people patterns of obedience, somehow in this first decade the Canadians accepted their old church fully in a new form as part of a new

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[36] AA.Q. *Copies des Lettres*, III, 274. For the Ste. Rose quarrel, see also *ibid*., 429, 431, 445, 447.

[37] *Ibid*., 435-6.

[38] G. Morisset: *L'Architecture en Nouvelle-France,* Québec, 1949, p. 52.

situation. By the beginning of 1774, even the wardens of the parish church in Quebec were prepared to yield. A weak parish priest had joined the wardens but he had died in January. In February, Lieutenant-Governor Cramahé had a conversation with the wardens and later interviewed the bishop, remarking, a trifle sentimentally, that, although only a dog of a protestant, he knew and admired an honest man. The result of these conversations was that peace was made and terms agreed on. Briand and his assisting priests celebrated a magnificent mass in the church which all at last now recognized as his cathedral. He attributed this to Cramahé's friendly intervention as well, no doubt, as to the spirit of grace working in the wardens and the people of the parish of Quebec.[39]

One may wonder why, favourable as Carleton and Cramahé both were to the church, they took so long to intervene on behalf of the bishop. Why did he have to wait three years outside of a finished church where, thanks to his sternness, mass had to be celebrated on one consecrated stone as if it stood in the midst of an empty wilderness? It is probably impossible to dissociate Briand's triumph in 1774 from the Quebec Act which was passed a month or so later. More than that, one must also certainly associate Briand and his increasing influence, in spite of the opposition he met, with the Quebec Act, although it is difficult to show the exact part that he played. Every Canadian historian likes to say his own word on this famous piece of legislation and, if possible, to correct or amend what his colleagues have said on the subject. I am going to take a new line and venture to correct myself. It now seems to me that in a recent discussion of the subject I did not sufficiently stress Briand's probable influence over Carleton in the general policy that was being developed in Carleton's mind during his four years in Quebec from 1766 to 1770 and in the subsequent years in England. From 1768 and on, Briand was hinting in his letters that Canadian civil law in general would probably be restored in the province. This might not have been difficult for him to guess or to hope for. But there is a significant letter written in 1773 to Carleton in England in which there is a strong hint of a very direct influence. "You know well enough the ... character of the Canadian. . . . *He is accustomed to being directed by his superiors. He may complain, but he will submit and bear the yoke and after a time will be quiet.*"[40] Here in brief is the policy of Carleton's Quebec Act – to re-impose on the Canadians the old authority which he believed they needed and would accept. In pressing this policy on the British government Carleton spoke of the influence of the seigneurs, and it has been assumed that he was advised by them. It is likely, I think, that he paid even more attention to the man whom he certainly would not quote to the very

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39 A.A.Q. *Copies des Lettres* IV, 475, 537.

40 *Ibid*., IV, 434. Underlining by the author.

protestant Dartmouth, then Secretary of State for the colonies. Briand wrote to Carleton in the letters that survive in terms of the greatest esteem and affection. He did not necessarily keep copies of all his letters and Carleton's papers have been destroyed. It is entirely possible that in the years 1770-1774 he wrote a good deal that has not survived.

As everyone knows, the Quebec Act did not produce the hoped-for attitude in the habitants of complete submission to church and state. The results, indeed, were a deep disappointment to Briand, as they were to Carleton. And yet, the Act did for him all that was needed. God, as he remarked, had relieved him of his fiercest opponents, the priest Récher, and Jacrau, the ecclesiastical lawyer, who had died a year or so later. And God gave him Carleton and the Quebec Act. Associating the policy of the Governor with the Act, he was able to ignore the hostile accompanying instructions and to assume that the British government's toleration would be actively benevolent. This did not give him a perfectly submissive church. It rather enabled him to engage in the on-going ecclesiastical conflicts with good hope of survival and ultimate safety.

Survival was all he could hope for at the moment. Whatever Carleton may have wanted to correct, he was still answerable to the British government. And the British government, tolerant and fearful of provoking trouble in Quebec, still was aware of the fierce anti-Catholic prejudice in London which led to the Gordon riots in 1780. Moreover everyone was aware of the imperial and commercial rivalry which was to bring renewed war between Britain and France in the period 1778 to 1783 and from 1793 to 1815. This situation meant that Great Britain of course maintained close supervision over the most powerful and most typically French and Roman Catholic institution in the colony. And it meant, too, that the use of the cultural and spiritual resources of France, notably in recruitment of priests, was impossible.

The real injury to the Canadian church of this period was not in any excessive authority exercised by Great Britain or in any success of the natural British wish to encourage an Erastian church. It lies rather in the inevitable impoverishment of this church in the wilderness, prohibited from importing priests from France, the only country whose priests were acceptable. Already before the close of the century the church shows some signs in its contests with hostile Protestant Loyalists of a certain narrowness and obscurantism which could be corrected only by fresh and lively contacts abroad. These had to wait for nearly half a century until friendlier relations between Britain and France, an increase of self-government in the colony, and steady perseverance in the difficult policy first marked out by Briand made possible, as M. Trudel has noted, an influx of priests and religious societies from France which launched the church in Quebec on a great new expansion. It is my view that what is impressive in the period is not so much the servitude of the church

or the servility of Briand as the skill and astuteness with which this sincere and apparently simple man contrived to use a complex triangular relationship – Britain, Quebec, and the Thirteen Colonies – to unite a divided church and to maintain all necessary ecclesiastical authority with, in the circumstances, remarkable freedom from state interference.