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Student Leaders at the University of Montreal During the Early 1950s: What Did Catholics Want?

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It has long been the fate of Quebec society of the 1950s to be overshadowed by the decade of the 1960s and the Quiet Revolution. The 1950s have been associated in the popular mind with the reactionary Duplessis regime. A parallel assumption has been that this regime drew strong support from the province's Catholic faithful, most of whom shared Duplessis' hostility to social change. In the last decade, scholars of the Quiet Revolution phenomenon have challenged this view of a society dominated by reactionary leaders adverse to social change and of Catholic supporters defending the status quo. Detailed research on Quebec society during the 1950s suggests that this decade was the "drum roll" period of the Quiet Revolution, a foreshadowing of developments leading up to the great social transformations of the 1960s.[1] More specifically, in the area of Church history, scholars have established that Catholics did not form a monolithic group of social conservatives in Quebec society in the 1950s. A growing number of Catholics both lay and clerics were questioning the Church's authority.[2]

Quebecers in the 1950s however could not predict the developments and transformations associated with the Quiet Revolution. They had no sense of being either precursors or impediments to future social change. What were they saying about social change? Turning to the attitudes and activities of university student leaders at the University of Montreal during the early 1950s provides useful insights into the way in which some Catholics in Quebec society envisaged social reform.

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[1] See Paul-André Linteau, René Durocher, Jean-Claude Robert, François Ricard. *Histoire du Québec contemporain. Tome II, Le Québec depuis 1930*, (nouv. éd.rév.), (Montréal: Boréal compact, 1989), p. 809.

[2] See, for instance, Jean Hamelin and Nicole Gagnon, *Histoire du catholicisme québécois. Le XXe siècle. Tome 11. De 1940 à nos jours*, (Montréal:Boréal Express, 1984), Michael Behiels, "Le père Georges-Henri Lévèsque et l'établissement des sciences sociales à Laval, 1938-1955," *Revue de l'Université d'Ottawa*, vol 53, #3, (juillet-septembre, 1982).

According to sociologists, French-Quebec university students in the early 1950s had a marked tendency to conform to their elders' expectations. These students, in their view, also lacked social commitments and were apolitical. Students devoted their free time to entertainment. As Richard Simoneau explains, they characterized themselves mainly by "strong tastes for aesthetics, erudition, leisure activities, humour and entertainment, social relations."[3]

In the view of sociologists,[4] one also gathers that being religious provided a tangible illustration of students' conformity and conservatism. Richard Simoneau explains that the students' traditional ideology had a "strong religious and cultural flavour."[5] In fact, it is entirely "tributary to the ideology of religious nationalism dominant in the society of the time."[6]

Yet, these scholars show no interest in students' religious beliefs per se. They appear to point out students' Catholicism in order to confirm students' support of the status quo. In this perspective, Catholicism is reduced to a measure of students' compliance.

There is no doubt that French Quebec university students were Catholic during the early 1950s.[7] Yet, to assume that this religious affiliation precluded any form of questioning of the status quo does not take into account many aspects of student attitudes and initiatives before the onslaught of the Quiet Revolution. Sources of information on student leaders at the University of Montreal during the early 1950s suggest that not only did these young people concern themselves with events and debates taking place beyond the university walls, but their social activism was in many ways fuelled by their Catholicism.

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[3] Richard Simoneau, "Idéologies étudiantes, doctrines universitaires et système universitaire: contribution à l'étude du mouvement étudiant au Québec," *Socialization and Values in Canadian Society*, vol 1, eds, E. Zureik and R.M. Pike (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1975),p. 220.

[4] Very few historians have shown an interest in the evolution of French Quebec university students' attitudes and activities in the 1950s, let alone their religious beliefs. A notable exception is the historian Pierre Savard, "Pax Romana, 1935-1962: une fenêtre étudiante sur le monde," *Les cahiers des Dix*, 1992 Numéro quarante-sept, (Québec: La Société des Dix, Sainte-Foy, édition La Liberté, 1993): pp. 279-323.

[5] *Ibid*. p.217.

[6] *Ibid*. p.218.

[7] In a survey in 1968,94.7% of French-Canadian students at the University of Montreal declared themselves Catholic. See Michèle Paquette, "Étude comparative des orientations académiques et de la mobilité sociale chez les diplômés canadiens-français catholiques et canadiens-anglais protestants de deux universités montréalaises," (MA thesis, Université de Montréal, 1968), p. 37.

These findings force us to reconsider the idea of French Quebec university students in the early fifties as apolitical and devoid of a social conscience. They also invite us to understand the impact of their Catholicism in a less unidimensional way. As this case study of student leaders' attitudes and activities will reveal, Catholicism served the interests of reform both in its traditional and modernist manifestations.

In this study we will focus on the areas in which student leaders at the University of Montreal brought into play their Catholic beliefs most directly.[8]

This means analyzing the way student leaders responded to what they identified as the problems of Quebec society as a whole and how they believed they could contribute to solve them.

Student leaders at the University of Montreal are defined as those who occupied executive positions in the Association générale des étudiants de l'Université de Montréal (AGEUM) and those who were members of the editorial staff of the student newspaper, the *Quartier Latin,* in the early 1950s.[9] From this group came the students' spokespersons who appeared before university authorities and many external organizations. The points of view and decisions adopted by student leaders were often perceived by university authorities, politicians or the general public as a reflection of mainstream opinions held by university youth as a whole. While student leaders were not a representative sample of the University of Montreal student population, their attitudes and activities held significance on the campus and even beyond the confines of the university.

In the early 1950s, student leaders at the University of Montreal felt they had a contribution to make towards the reform of their society. Indeed, during those years these young people devoted much time and energy to thinking about the nature and orientation of their social responsibilities. It must be noted that they spent more time trying to define these responsibilities than actually translating them into action. However, this more abstract type of social commitment does not in any way diminish its importance or its integrity.

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[8] For other areas of activity that generated the activist efforts of student leaders see my Ph.D thesis "L'Evolution des attitudes et des activités des leaders étudiants de l'Université de Montréal de 1950 à 1958" (Ph.D dissertation, Université de Montréal, Montreal, 1992) or my article "Student Leaders at the University of Montreal from 1950 to 1958: Beyond the 'Carabin Persona'," *Journal of Canadian Studies/Revue d'études canadiennes*, vol 29, #3, (Fall/ Automne 1994).

[9] The conclusions will be drawn principally from documentary sources, most of which come from the University of Montreal. The papers of the AGEUM and the issues of the *Quartier Latin* helped to retrace the evolution of student beliefs and activities. Interviews with a dozen former student leaders of the period supplemented the archival records.

Student leaders did not come up with the same recipes for social action. However, all of them shared certain assumptions and beliefs that they did not question. To begin with, student leaders at the University of Montreal all believed that they were destined to become members of Quebec's intellectual and professional elite. In essence, they felt that they should use their time at university to prepare themselves to take on the responsibilities of Quebec's future elite: "The university elite which will fill positions in public life must prepare for its role."[10] Among other things, this meant developing the capacity to analyze and evaluate social trends.

All agreed, however, that this evaluation should take place outside political parties. For these students, getting involved in a political party would compromise the advantages they were gaining through higher education. The university provided an environment of freedom conducive to intellectual growth. Political parties, on the contrary, required their members to conform and stifle autonomous thought. In fact, judging from various student leaders' pronouncements, it appears as though these young people felt that partisan politics should be left to adults who had the time to develop their own ideas: "...it will never be too late to choose the political circle that will best meet one's aspirations."[11] But if one joined a party prematurely: "An insidious perversion occurs: the mind, which normally should be open, adheres to the party's principles, becomes tendentious."[12] The fact that many students perceived the world of politics as corrupt and shady also contributed to their hands-off approach when it came to partisan politics.

If the great majority of student leaders believed in steering clear of partisan politics to act upon social commitments and responsibilities, they did share a vision of what ailed Quebec society in the early 1950s. Indeed, underpinning student leaders' thoughts about social activism was the common belief that their society was undergoing a crisis. This was a crisis they defined in moral terms. In their eyes, Quebec society was prey to a corrupt value system, its citizens increasingly dominated by materialistic and selfish goals. Quebecers were immersed in a world where the Christian priorities of helping one's neighbour and sharing one's goods with the poor

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[10] Pierre Perrault, "Nous, La Politique et Les Politiciens," *QL*, 21 February 1950. All student quotations have been translated by the author.

[11] Yvon Côté, "La Politique à l'Université," *QL*, 18 February 1954.

[12] Hubert Aquin, "La politique à l'AGEUM," *QL*, 16 March 1951. Robert Bourassa, who was a member of the youth wing of the Liberal Party, was one of the rare student leaders to argue in favour of student involvement in partisan politics at that time. While he admitted that political power could corrupt and stifle freedom of thought, he remained convinced that this type of social action "...allows the committed to work in 'real life'...." See Robert Bourassa, "Étudiants et Partis Politiques," *QL*, 17 February 1955.

had been replaced by a shameful preference for accumulated wealth. More significantly, student leaders appeared to agree that the student population as a whole had all too readily fallen prey to the dominant culture's immorality. Students had been swallowed up by a shameless pride in accumulated wealth and personal ambition without any regard for the fate of society's disposessed. In the words of Yves Lapierre: "We; 'the elite of tomorrow' are preparing a nice future for ourselves: our little comforts, our future security, our personal prestige, here are for most of us our only preoccupations."[13] In other words, the students were actually *contributing* to the general moral crisis. Student leaders viewed this as a particularly alarming state of affairs since university students would eventually be called upon to occupy the leading positions in society.

To fight the materialistic and selfish tendencies of their colleagues, student leaders promoted an ideal directly modelled on the Christian principles of service to others and charity. In this way they revealed a common sense of values and priorities. Student leaders would turn to these common Christian values and priorities to define their social role. By following the Christian ideal of service to others, Quebec's professional apprentices would be able to overcome their selfish ambitions and would also be better equipped to contribute to the good of society in general. Thus student leaders at that time regularly exhorted their colleagues to "...give back to the professions the vigour of Christian charity,"[14] and "not to use our profession to serve our personal ambitions but to put it in the service of others."[15]

Student leaders were not satisfied with merely exhorting their colleagues to follow a model type behaviour. They came up with strategies to inculcate a Christian sense of responsibility among the student population. The creation of "Conférences de faculté" provide a concrete illustration. These faculty workshops were meant to complement the professional training of the elite of tomorrow and to inculcate in the participants the Christian idea of service to others. They gave students the opportunity to address moral questions linked to a specific profession.[16]

However, a closer look at student leaders' attitudes reveals that they did not always agree on the best way to promote Christian values, or to put it differently, on the exact nature of their social responsibilities as young Catholic intellectuals. There were two basic approaches among student leaders:

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[13] Yves Lapierre, "Examen de Conscience," *QL*, 30 October 1952.

[14] Fernand Léonard, "Rôle des Professions," *QL*, 11 December 1952.

[15] René Major, "De l'Université à la Vie," *QL*, 15 September 1955.

[16] Thus, for instance, students of the Optometry faculty set up the Conférence Carrière, students of the Faculty of Social Sciences, Economics and Politics set up the Conférence Montpetit.

a traditional and a modernist approach. These distinctions must be understood more as trends than actual categories. Indeed, not all student leaders' positions and initiatives fell under either one of these two approaches. Some student attitudes are difficult to categorize as they co-habit in both. Nonetheless, they help identify some of the significantly different ways in which some student leaders thought about Catholicism and social reform.

For the traditionalist student leaders, it was not enough to convince their fellow students to adhere to the Christian values of service to others and charity. In their view, if these values were to be effective, they would have to be based on the personal spiritual regeneration that would come from practising the Catholic religion. They had no doubt that the student population needed spiritual regeneration. Traditionalists frequently chastised their fellow students for leading a superficial spiritual life, dictated by habit and routine. Only by deepening their understanding of the Catholic Church's teachings and by exposing themselves to its sacraments, could students hope to find the inspiration and the strength to live by the Christian ideal of service to others. In other words, for student leaders with a traditionalist perspective, the way to reform the values of Quebec's future elite and eventually those of the whole society was to promote the spiritual reform of the individual.

This conservative approach to initiating social action was based on reformist recipes elaborated in the past by the Catholic Church. Thus, they did not question the basic tenets of Quebec society, its divisions of power or the role of the State. Essentially, they believed that "...the work to be accomplished is one of personal revolution, and it is only by direct action on individuals that it can take place."[17]

These traditionalist leaders hoped to reach their goal through Catholic student associations such as Pax Romana and the Fédération des étudiants des universités catholiques du Canada.[18] The members of these organizations set up discussion groups, conferences, free public courses, films, exhibits and lectures, all in an attempt: "...to fill the gap that now exists among many students between their professional and their private life as Catholics."[19]

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[17] Yvon Chartier and Denis Lazure, "Mort et Résurrection," *QL*, 3 November 1950.

[18] Pax Romana was established in 1921 with its head office in Fribourg, Switzerland. For further information see Pierre Savard's article. The Fédération was founded in 1935. Following a period of stagnation, it was brought back to life in November 1950 by student leaders at the University of Montreal, Laval, the University of Ottawa and at a few Maritime universities.

[19] Rosaire Beaulé, "Pax Romana ...dans les Universités Catholiques du Canada," *QL*, 6 March 1951.

It must be said that if traditionalist student leaders tended to define their social responsibilities in terms of the students' future role as members of Quebec's Catholic professional elite, they also considered that Catholic students had present obligations towards the dispossessed. They felt they should try to improve the living conditions of the less fortunate. Faithful to their traditionalist perspective, these student leaders tried to alleviate the suffering of the poor around them through the agency of charitable organizations. Specifically, the student committee of the St. Vincent de Paul Society was one way these young people tried to "deepen further their duties of charity and to help the poor."[20] Members of this committee took on about 20 families; among other things, they visited them twice a month to give them money and various goods.

There is no sign that their charitable visits led them to question the causes of poverty. The traditionalist student leaders' objective was to meet the immediate needs of the people under their care, and to alleviate to the best of their ability the daily impact of poverty. They seem to have assumed that economic disparities were a given with which one must learn to cope. In that perspective, their social initiatives among the dispossessed fitted easily into the established framework of Quebec society. They were not promoting new schemes for social reform.

Not all student leaders put as much faith in the benefits of individual spiritual regeneration to reform their peers' corrupted sense of values and to alter their society's immoral priorities. Student leaders with a modernist outlook believed that by creating an open climate on campus, which allowed for public discussions and intellectual scrutiny of the Church's teachings and pronouncements, students would develop a stronger and more influential Catholic faith and, in turn, strengthen society's Christian values. Modernist students, in agreement with their traditionalist colleagues, deplored the lukewarm spiritual life of French-Canadian society, and more particularly that of the student population. They agreed with the objectives of organizations such as Pax Romana. However, in their view the traditionalist remedies could only be seen as a starting point.

The modernists' evaluation of the problems of Quebec society led them to take a more critical stance on the status quo. Indeed not only did they accuse university students of being Catholics out of habit rather than out of conviction, they faulted them for being "bêtement catholiques" ("stupid Catholics").[21] According to the modernists, blind religious conformity, more

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[20] Yves Let bvre, "Si St Vincent de Paul pouvait...," *QL*, 30 September 1954. The author informs us that students in 1951 put this charitable organization back on its feet. It was now part of the numerous university associations.

[21] Jean-Guy Blain, "Carrefour," *QL*, 27 January 1950.

than a lack of spiritual commitment, made students vulnerable to the assaults of immoral and atheist arguments. As the young Gilles Duguay pointed out, "As soon as a dogma, a truth is put into question, we find ourselves disconcerted ...."[22] In effect, modernist student leaders questioned their colleagues' capacity to think for themselves, particularly in the field of religion. In their view, all too many students obeyed the Catholic precepts without making any attempt to understand their foundations and implications. Was it any wonder then that so many of them succumbed to materialist priorities or became vulnerable to atheist arguments?

In order to develop a more vigorous Catholicism, modernists were convinced that students had to develop a more reasoned understanding of their faith. This meant having the opportunity to assess religious questions intellectually, to debate the clergy's instructions. As the young Adèle Lauzon pointed out, "We must be Christian but understand why we are... Because we are at a time where one must account for everything. In order to do so, we must have understood ourselves."[23] This desire to contribute to the promotion of a more "reasoned Catholicism" was all the more important for these young people because they saw it as part of their social responsibility. Indeed they believed that working to develop the Christian thought of their fellow students corresponded to their role as Quebec's future intellectual elite.

It is important to appreciate that by linking their social role to the promotion of religion as a legitimate topic of discussion, modernist student leaders were flirting with controversy. They were indirectly challenging the way a good many Catholic authorities in Quebec saw relations between the Church and Catholic intellectuals. As the historian Michael Behiels has noted: "...during the 1950s, most traditional Catholics continued to believe that Catholic intellectuals had no right to participate in a discussion in which everything including the premises of their own faith, was questioned."[24] This was precisely what modernist student leaders refused to accept.

How did modernist students intend to promote a Catholic intellectual life among their colleagues? Unlike their traditionalist counterparts, modernist student leaders did not generally turn to structured organizations to promote their reformist solutions. They tended to use the pages of the *Quartier Latin* on an individual basis, hoping that through provocative articles they could convince their readers of the merits of a more "reasoned Catholicism." Adèle

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[22] Gilles Duguay, "Dangereuse expérience," editorial, *QL*, 16 October 1951.

[23] Adèle Lauzon, "Le sens de l'athéisme contemporain," *QL*, 21 March 1950.

[24] Michael Behiels, *Prelude to Quebec's Quiet Revolution: Liberalism versus Neo-nationalism, 1945-1960*, (Kingston & Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1985), p.79.

Lauzon's article on "The meaning of contemporary atheism"[25] offers a good illustration of this approach. Lauzon was not trying to defend the atheist perspective;[26] she argued that a deeper understanding of that philosophy would lead to a deeper understanding of Christianity and in turn to a stronger religious faith.

It is interesting to note that modernist students at that time firmly believed that discussing one's faith could only strengthen it. They did not seem to have entertained the possibility that by studying religion through an intellectual prism they might weaken their Catholic beliefs.

While some modernist student leaders chose to offer models of open intellectual discussions by broaching reputedly controversial religious topics, others tried instead to identify what they saw as general prerequisites to a truly well thought-out Catholicism. Clearly for modernists, the capacity to discuss one's faith with *sincerity* was of foremost importance. The young Hubert Aquin was the most adamant proponent of this revered quality. In his view, "...sincerity leads man to do his best ...."[27] The modernist students were very much aware that by advocating the merits of "sincere thought," they were implicitly criticizing their colleagues for a *lack* of sincerity in religious discussions. Their enthusiasm for sincerity can also be understood as a claim for a specific right: the right to discuss freely, without constraint, the religious issues that preoccupied them.

These students were aware that sincerity carried with it the risk of provoking a certain anxiety. In their eyes, however, this anxiety became the expression of a non-conformist and well thought-out faith. Those who were anxious proved by their state of mind that they had turned their backs on the complacency brought on by blind religious submission. The anxious Catholic was a truly authentic Catholic. The admiration some modernist students showed for the French writer André Gide, an author whose work was on the Index, can be seen as evidence of the value they placed on sincerity and authenticity. In 1950, the *Quartier Latin* noted the death of the author with two pages of commemorative articles. Although the students who celebrated Gide's contributions deplored with severity his numerous immoral "thirsts," they nonetheless admired what one student called his "thirst for authenticity."[28] In fact, discussing this author's work gave them the opportunity to reiterate the deficiencies they attributed to the Catholic religion as

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[25] Published in the *QL* of 21 March 1950.

[26] Quite the contrary, she considered that those who were attracted by atheist philosophies were revealing a misguided desire for freedom inspired by unhealthy feelings of "revolt against authority." *Ibid.*

[27] Hubert Aquin, "Recherche d'authenticité," *QL*, 2 March 1951.

[28] *Ibid.*

it was practised in Quebec. Hubert Aquin believed that it was "Unfortunate that Gide is not better read here, he would freshen up our musty religion. He would undoubtedly insert some anxiety but also sincerity in our religious armour."[29]

It is also revealing that the French writer Albert Camus did not inspire the same admiration. Students qualified the character in Camus's novel *L'Etranger* as "absurd,"[30] taken from "an order that is not ours."[31] This comparatively negative evaluation was more than likely linked to Camus's well known atheist convictions. In contrast to Gide, the author of *L'Etranger* proved much more categorical in his religious beliefs. For young people who had expressed a desire to lead a Catholic spiritual life and who had also shown an aversion to any form of dogmatism, it is not surprising that they would find it difficult to identify with the works of this unequivocally atheist author.

Yet this thirst for sincerity and authenticity led modernist student leaders to express far more audacious sympathies than those they manifested towards anxious authors like André Gide. They showed a great admiration for the controversial ideas of a growing number of French-Canadian adult intellectuals who deplored their society's oppressive religious atmosphere and who demanded more freedom of expression for the laity inside the Catholic Church. These adult reformists, mainly members of the French-Canadian intelligentsia, were demanding that lay Catholics gain the right "to participate in the policy and decision-making processes of the Catholic Church."[32] They also questioned the religious authorities' monopoly in the governing of temporal matters, especially those pertaining to health and education.

Student leaders at the University of Montreal were aware of these new ideas on the role of the laity. Even traditionalist students expressed the opinion that the laity should be given wider responsibilities. However, when they offered concrete examples, traditionalists only mentioned missionary work as a potential additional responsibility for the laity. By choosing overseas missionary work, these students were not proposing to disrupt the existing division of labour that existed between the clergy and the laity in

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[29] *Ibid*. His colleague Jean-Guy Laurin concurred when he stated that students: "do not believe they are sinning ...when they are assimilating information from people they feel are sincere." Jean-Guy Laurin, "Invitation à l'inquiétude," *QL*, 12 December 1950.

[30] Roger Marcil, "L'Étranger est venu chez moi," *QL*, 27 January 1950.

[31] Raymond-Marie Léger, "Portrait de l'Étranger," *QL,* 6 December 1949.

[32] Michael Behiels, *op. cit*., p.76.

Quebec society. Clearly, they were attracted to the reformist ideas of the secularization movement that were least likely to affect the status quo.

This was certainly not the case of the modernist student leaders. They seemed to be interested in the whole range of issues raised by the dissatisfied Catholic reformists, including issues that would require fundamental changes in the relations between the Church and the laity.

It is important to appreciate that modernist student leaders' approval of the tenets of a greater secularization were more often than not expressed indirectly. Rather than suggest changes themselves, rather than elaborating new modes of organization between the clergy and the laity, they tended to present their points of view by expressing their admiration for the adult intellectuals who, at the time, were openly proposing a redefinition of lay and clergy tasks. By presenting their positions in this indirect way, they managed to discuss controversial topics while at the same time playing the less compromising role of favourable commentators.

Their laudatory articles on notable non-conformist publications such as *Cité Libre* and *Le Devoir* offer a good illustration of this type of modernist critique. Modernist student leaders appreciated the fact that in *Cité Libre*, they could find frank and direct discussions on questions involving the Catholic Church, questions that dealt with: "the religious atmosphere in French Canada,...the Christian faith and the temporal mission"; all issues that in the words of Juliette Barcelo, "belong to the laity and must concern it."[33] In the eyes of the modernists, this journal answered the needs of youth because its young authors had the courage to address "'free questions,' in other words questions that until then were exclusively reserved for the clergy."[34]

Modernist student leaders' admiration for *Le Devoir* was more generally linked to the values they placed on freedom of expression. As the young André Morel declared: "This is a newspaper that has opted to think and to say what it thinks" whether it be "about national politics, religious and artistic events, [or] current events."[35]

However, modernist student leaders did express their controversial approbation for secularization more directly through opinion papers of their own. They were particularly critical of the Church's monopoly in the field

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[33] Juliette Barcelo, "'L'obéissance à l'Église n'exclut pas la discussion entre chrétiens', Gérard Pelletier," *QL*, 15 January 1953.

[34] *Ibid.*

[35] André Morel, "'Le Devoir' a déclaré la guerre," *QL*, 9 March 1951.

of education, especially the control it exercised over the classical colleges.[36] Thus, to the great dismay of Claude Paulette, "...members of the clergy seem to believe that as a matter of fact they are the only authorized teachers in Quebec." This young journalist then criticized the clergy "for refusing almost obstinately to let a few laymen infiltrate our classical colleges."[37] Nor is Paulette the only student to voice this complaint. His colleague Gérard Potvin explained that "...the time has come to ... replace [the clergy] in this additional responsibility and to allow it to devote itself more freely to the religious tasks that overwhelm it."[38] It must be noted that this kind of request did not only reflect modernist support for secularization. Clearly university students would have much to gain professionally from the secularization of teaching.

If the modernist students' criticisms underline their audacity, it is important to point out that at this stage these students also took great care to couch their critical comments cautiously. Undoubtedly they were intent on reassuring the religious authorities that they remained committed to the institution of the Catholic Church. Thus Claude Paulette felt the need to add: "One must make a distinction between the Church and its priests, because they are the ones we are criticizing."[39] As for the young Gérard Potvin, he felt the need to explain that "The time is neither for anti-clericalism or clericalism, but for collaboration,"[40] presumably to ward off reprimands from the clergy. These students had no intention of initiating a confrontation. Their impatience concerning the existing division of labour between the laity and the clergy did not lead them to defy the clergy, much less to question their own allegiance to the Catholic Church. It is important to remember that in their eyes, opening up discussions in religious matters and increasing the responsibilities of the laity were meant to *strengthen* Catholics' faith.

There was another topic hotly debated by Quebec's political and intellectual elite at the time that attracted the attention of student leaders at the University of Montreal, whether they be traditionalists or modernists, namely the problem associated with the growing industrialization and urbanization of Quebec society. Student leaders were clearly aware of the difficult living conditions of the working class and the increasing grievances of workers.

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[36] There is no doubt about the Church's control in that section of the school system. The proportion of lay teachers in these institutions was very low: from 1911 to 1951, 90% of teachers were priests. By 1956, lay teachers represented a little less than a fifth of the total. See Claude Galarneau, *Les collèges classiques au Canada français*, (Montreal: Fides, 1978), p.112.

[37] Claude Paulette, "Doit-on être anti-clérical," *QL*, 29 November 1949.

[38] Gérard Potvin, "Peut-on remplacer le clergé?," *QL*, 6 December 1949.

[39] Claude Paulette, *op. cit.*

[40] Gérard Potvin, *op. cit.*

They also agreed that: "The student as a citizen must concern himself with the social problem and participate in its solution."[41] This was their duty as Christians concerned with social justice. But they noted as well, that it was in their interest as future professionals, future bosses. As the young Denise Godbout explained, the promotion of workers: "...will take place *against* or *with* us."[42]

As in other areas, student leaders did not necessarily agree on the best way to deal with what they called the "social problem." The traditionalists generally called upon directives from the religious authorities. More specifically, they approved the message contained in the various papal encyclicals on the issue. According to Yvon Chartier: "The Church throughout its history has worked for the raising of the masses. The Encyclicals are wonderful action programs."[43] Although the modernist students did not reject the teachings of the Church, they showed a preference for more direct participation to the solution of the social problem. By getting involved in the activities of the Equipe de recherches sociales (ERS) during the early 1950s, some student leaders hoped to: "...create links between the working class and the student class."[44] In fact, they considered the ERS as "a training and social action school."[45] Essentially, they aimed to organize weekly forums during which invited speakers would discuss their experience with social problems.

Yet, it soon became obvious that the work undertaken by the ERS remained at an embryonic stage. The ERS progressively disappeared from the campus. After January 1951, there were no more references to it in the *Quartier Latin* or in the minutes of the student association. This did not mean that modernist student leaders lost interest in the social problem. However, it appears that they came to the conclusion that the best way to

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[41] André Guérin and François Vachon, "Les ouvriers manifestent leur solidarité sur le plan politique," *QL*, 28 January 1954.

[42] Denise Godbout, "Du travail pour tous," *QL*, 26 January 1951.

[43] Yvon Chartier, "Justice ou Amour Social?," *QL*, 26 January 1951.

[44] Adèle Lauzon, "L'Équipe de recherches sociales," *QL*, 18 October 1949. The historian Michael Behiels explains that the ERS was founded in 1947 by the young lean-Marc Léger and other students at the University of Montreal to "mak(e) students aware of Quebec's contemporary problems, especially the worker problem which had been neglected, by and large by French Canada" lay and clerical leaders." See Michael Behiels, *op. cit*., p.33.

[45] *Ibid.* Evidence suggests that some members of the ERS considered their initiative in opposition to the traditionalist perspective. How else could one interpret the description of the ERS objectives they provided for Le Devoir: the ERS work towards "a true promotion of the working class to establish true social justice that means something other than the reading of pontifical texts to appease one's social conscience."? Equipe de Recherches Sociales, "Pour rétablir le dialogue" under the heading "Jeunesse en marche" published in *Le Devoir*, 27 August 1949.

assume their responsibilities towards the working class was to remain informed about its situation, and to be aware of its living conditions and aspirations. They attempted to keep their fellow students informed about the progress of trade-unionism or workers' political activism by writing a few articles on the subject in the student newspaper.[46]

But how did the religious authorities of the University respond to the modernist students' initiatives? Generally speaking they certainly agreed that university students should develop a deeper sense of social responsibility and they strongly believed that the Catholic religion provided them with the necessary source of inspiration. Thus the Rector, Mgr Irèné Lussier, explained to a student that: "I feel it is my duty to sharpen your awareness of the social responsibilities that will be yours in the future..."[47] However, one thing is clear, the university authorities were far from convinced that the open discussions advocated by the modernists were the best way to strengthen one's faith. As early as 1950, the *Quartier Latin* received a "Warning from the Rector."[48] In this warning, the Rector explained that the University had received complaints concerning articles printed in the student newspaper. These articles were precisely the ones in which students had expressed opinions about issues involving the Catholic Church. The Rector declared that students should not: "... 'flirt' with dangerous doctrines, as a pretext for liberty and tolerance. Less than ever is it time for that kind of imprudence."[49] As a result the Rector decided that from then on, all articles published in the Quartier Latin would have to pass through his office beforehand. In other words, the student newspaper was to be censored.

The Rector's intervention provoked a student reaction which further illustrates the modernist position with regards to their role as social reformers and their attitude towards the Catholic Church. Some students suggested ignoring the new rules in the name of freedom of expression. Yet, in the end, they opted for a less provocative response, namely to voice their displeasure during their annual parade and to reassure the authorities that they had no intention of "flirting" with dangerous doctrines. Thus, the young Marcel Blouin explained that an ideal student newspaper was one that has a "total freedom of the press" but also that omits: "...with the full agreement

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[46] See, among others, Jacques Robichaud, "Syndicats et action politique," *QL*, 23 October 1954; Léonard Fournier, "Les syndicats ont-ils besoin des intellectuels?" *QL*, 17 February 1955.

[47] Student interview with Mgr Irenée Lussier, "Monseigneur Lussier a toujours été, mêlé au milieu universitaire," *QL*, 15 September 1955.

[48] See Billet de la Direction, "Avertissement du Recteur," *QL*, 10 March 1950.

[49] Olivier Maurault, p.ss.,P.D., "Le Quartier Latin: Journal d'étudiants," *QL*, 22 September 1950.

of the newspaper staff and following its own judgement, scandalous articles and inappropriate texts. Only these would be omitted and this by the students."[50] Indeed, in his view, abolishing the new university censorship would better serve the Catholic religion on campus. Eventually the university authorities modified their censorship policy. Instead two "modérateurs" would read over articles that were "slightly tendentious and inappropriate."[51]

It is a mark of the moderation of the student leaders that they greeted this new diluted form of censorship as a "happy ending." Obviously, in the early 1950s, student leaders were not willing to go beyond certain limits to express their opposition to university authorities. From this episode, one can gather that they had no intention of alienating the university's religious authorities and even less of threatening the foundations of Catholicism at the University.

The attitudes and activities of student leaders at the University of Montreal during the early 1950s suggest that far from being apolitical or devoid of a social conscience, these young people all wanted to contribute to reform their society – a society they believed was in the throes of a moral crisis. Furthermore, as the future elite of their society, they felt it was their responsibility to reform their society by promoting Christian values. Thus, social reform for these students was intimately linked to their Catholic faith. It provided them with a guide, a source of social remedies. However, student leaders did not all agree as to how Catholicism could best contribute to social reform. For the traditionalists, each student should deepen his faith by reacquainting himself with the teachings of the Church. Through individual spiritual reform would come social reform. On the other hand, the modernist student leaders found inspiration in new solutions brought forth by the reformist adult intelligentsia of the period, solutions that heralded the debates and changes associated with the Quiet Revolution that would emerge a few years later. They believed Quebec society should benefit from a more open climate of discussion in the field of religion and they wanted to contribute to creating such a climate. The presence of these modernist student leaders reveals that there were university students in the early 1950s in Quebec ready to be controversial Catholics, Catholics who did not conform to the hopes of the religious authorities. Yet it is important to remember that however critical of the status quo some of these modernist students might be, they remained faithful Catholics. Their dissatisfaction with the Church did not lead them to question their faith. In fact, on several occasions it is clear that they shared enough values and priorities with the

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[50] Marcel Blouin, "Les trois libertés," *QL*, 6 October 1950.

[51] See the first page of the *Quartier Latin*, "Rédaction: Censure Levée," *QL*, 31 October 1950.

members of the Catholic clergy to want to stay on good terms with them. Clearly then, radical confrontation in the early 1950s, the type that does not back down in the face of authority, remained unthinkable even for the most critical student leaders.

The impact of Catholicism as a motor of social reform among student leaders would wane towards the end of the decade. By that time a growing number of student leaders were backing state control of universities along with the other main demands of the declericalization movement. Soon French-Quebec nationalism would provide them with the main intellectual and emotional stimulant for social reform. Yet, during the early 1950s, Catholicism was the important fuel for social activism among student leaders at the University of Montreal, whether for traditionalists or modernists.