

Why the Quiet Revolution was “Quiet”: The Catholic Church’s Reaction to the Secularization of Nationalism in Quebec after 1960¹

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Writing about the rapid secularization of Quebec society in the 1960s and 1970s, Hubert Guindon remarks, “In every respect except calendar time, centuries – not decades – separate the Quebec of the 1980s from the Quebec of the 1950s.”² A similar observation might be made about the Church of Quebec and its development between 1960 and 1980. Before 1960, the Church exercised a virtual monopoly over education, health care, and the social services offered to French Quebecers who formed the majority of the population. During his years as premier from 1944 to 1959, Maurice Duplessis had declared Quebec a Catholic province and actively promoted the Church’s welfare. In 1958, more than eighty-five percent of the population identified themselves as Catholic and more than eighty-eight percent of those Catholics attended mass every Sunday.³ A virtual army of nuns, priests, and brothers, which by 1962 numbered more than 50,000, oversaw the Church’s massive bureaucracy.⁴ This semi-established status and public pres-

¹ The research for this article was completed during the tenure of a doctoral fellowship from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada and the Principal’s Dissertation Fellowship offered by McGill University, Montreal, Canada.

² Hubert Guindon, *Quebec Society: Tradition, Modernity, and Nationhood*, ed. Roberta Hamilton and John L. McMullan, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1988), p. 138.

³ Reginald Bibby, *Unknown Gods: The Ongoing Story of Religion in Canada*, (Toronto: Stoddart Publishing Co., 1993), p. 6, table 1.1.

⁴ Jean Hamelin, “Société en mutation, église en redéfinition, le catholicisme québécois contemporain, de 1940 à nos jours,” dans *La croix et le nouveau monde. Histoire religieuse des francophones d’Amérique du nord*, dir. Guy-Marie Oury, 217-36, (Montréal: Éditions C.L.D./C.M.D., 1987), p. 224. Despite these impressive figures, the Church was already in the midst of a crisis in vocations, organization, and morale. See Jean Hamelin, *Histoire du catholicisme québécois. Le XXe siècle. Tome 2. De 1940 à nos jours*, (Montréal: Boréal Express, 1984), pp. 160-91.

ence was legitimated by the traditional religious nationalism, which united a conservative, clerical version of Catholicism and French Canadian ethnic identity.

By 1980, the situation had changed dramatically. The Quebec state had taken over the Church's work in education, health care, and the social services. This "Quiet Revolution" meant that the state and not the Church was to be "the embodiment of the French nation in Canada."⁵ While the roots of the Quiet Revolution could be seen in the rapid economic growth and the growth of state power of the 1920s,⁶ the changes of the 1960s were experienced as a dramatic shift. Thus the Church had to react both to its loss of real power and to its loss of control over the important symbols, stories, and values carried by traditional religious nationalism. By 1980 no nationalist group sought to promote a Catholic political culture or to remake Quebec's economy in conformity with the Church's social teaching. No one imagined that Quebec was a Catholic state. Like its control over schools, hospitals, and social services, the Church leadership saw its control over nationalist movements evaporate in two decades.

Remarkably, the Church reacted to the secularization of Quebec society with relative serenity. Certainly, the bishops and other religious leaders objected to the government's plans for the secularization of education and the religious communities opposed the reforms which turned their hospitals into public institutions.⁷ But generally, Quebec society avoided the tragic cultural schism that marked the movement into secular modernity of Catholic countries like France and Italy. In Quebec, the Church did not withdraw into a "Catholic ghetto," anathematize the new society, and work towards a restoration of the old order.⁸ Part of the reason for this was that many of the supporters of the reforms were members of the Church.

In Catholic societies, it is natural that opposition to the regime have its origins within the Church. The important question becomes how did Quebec avoid the history of schism experienced by France, Italy, Mexico, Spain and other Catholic countries? For although the Quiet Revolution was inspired by and promoted some complaints against religion, even anticlericalism, there was no massive rejection of religion on behalf of the modernizers. Even today, while only twenty-nine percent of Catholics attend mass on Sunday,

⁵ Guindon, *Quebec Society*, p. 104.

⁶ Jean Hamelin et Nicole Gagnon, *Histoire du catholicisme québécois. Le XXe siècle*. Tome 1. 1898-1940, (Montréal: Boréal Express, 1984), pp. 442-43.

⁷ Hamelin, *Histoire du catholicisme*, pp. 245-59.

⁸ Gregory Baum, *The Church in Quebec*, (Ottawa: Novalis, 1991), pp. 15-47. See also David Martin, *A General Theory of Secularization*, (New York: Harper and Row, 1978).

most have retained their Catholic identity and insist on Catholic religious education for their children.⁹

The Quiet Revolution coincided with the reforms of the Second Vatican Council, which radically altered the Church's self-definition, and the emergence of a faith and justice movement in the late 1960s and 1970s. José Casanova has argued that the Council rejected any vision of religious establishment, that is, the use of state power to impose a Catholic religious monopoly on society.¹⁰ Thus just as the Quebec state was declaring its autonomy from the Church, the Church was itself affirming the autonomy of political society, the freedom of individual consciences in political matters, and the need for citizens to involve themselves in the important debates and projects of their societies. Because of this coincidence, Gregory Baum has argued that Catholics in Quebec could be critical of the old Quebec and its religious nationalism, and still remain good Catholics. Despite misunderstandings, heated disagreements, and personal grievances, the Quebec Church and state learned to cooperate and compromise in a spirit of pluralism, reform, and tolerance.¹¹ This is not to say that the Second Vatican Council and the emergence of a faith and justice movement were the direct causes of the Church's acceptance of the new society and the new nationalism, but these developments allowed the Church to become more open to compromise and undermined the position of Catholic conservatives who dreamed of a restoration of the old society.

One of the most important issues was the Church's acceptance of the secularization of French-Canadian nationalism. If the Quebec state had the power to make the reforms of the 1960s "revolutionary," then the Church had the power to make the revolution "quiet" – or not. Its reconciliation to the new nationalism has helped to determine the shape of Quebec culture and society after 1960.

While the British North America Act implicitly gave the Catholic Church a semi-established status in the province of Quebec, the two most important motors of modernization, democratic political structures and capitalist economic institutions, remained outside of its control.¹² Consequently, despite its important role in Quebec society, the Church was most often in the position of reacting to social change. From 1900 to 1930, the Church responded to industrialization and modernization with what Guindon has called an "administrative revolution," an unprecedented campaign to

⁹ See Micheline Milot, "Le catholicisme au creuset de la culture," *Studies in Religion*, 20, no. 1, (1991): pp. 51-64.

¹⁰ José Casanova, *Public Religions in the Modern World*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), pp. 71-73.

¹¹ Baum, *The Church in Quebec*, pp. 38-47.

¹² Guindon, *Quebec Society*, pp. 103-104.

create new institutions and bureaucracies to meet the needs of French Catholics in every realm of modern urban life.¹³ Besides multiplying its institutions which provided education, health care, and social services, the Church promoted the growth of Catholic labour unions, farmers' cooperatives, credit unions, pious leagues, newspapers, radio and television shows, films, and Catholic Action groups for workers, students, women, farmers, and nationalists. This project was encouraged by Pope Pius XI, who founded the Catholic Action movement to encourage Catholics to form "intermediary bodies" or voluntary associations to mediate between individuals and the state apparatus. Conservative Catholics dreamed that these bodies would eventually reclaim all those functions in society that had been wrenched from the Church's control.¹⁴

While other peoples met the challenges of industrialization and modernization with programs of what sociologist Karl Deutsch has called "nation-building,"¹⁵ French-Canadian nationalists embarked on an aggressive programme of "church-building" with the goal of creating an "*Église-nation*" (nation-Church) rather than a nation-state. While they encouraged state intervention in specific projects (such as the *colonisation* of the hinterlands of Quebec), French Canadian nationalists usually preferred to resolve conflicts by creating religiously inspired social structures rather than appealing to state power. For example, in the Church's corporatist response to the Depression, the actions of the state were limited to those realms where the first agents of society (the family and the Church) were as yet incapable of fulfilling their responsibilities. Typically, French-Canadian nationalism was marked by a certain *anti-étatisme* and *apolitisme*.¹⁶ Because it was rooted in a profoundly conservative, clerical, Catholic triumphalism, this nationalism could be xenophobic, intolerant, and repressive, as evidenced by its crusades against Jews, socialists, and Jehovah's Witnesses in the name of religious and national solidarity. Despite the anti-modern discourse that its authors employed, this bureaucratic revolution ironically promoted the modernization of French Quebec society including that of the Church itself

¹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 20-21.

¹⁴ Hamelin et Gagnon, *Histoire du catholicisme*, pp. 175-291; Nive Voisine, André Beaulieu, et Jean Hamelin, *Histoire de l'Église catholique au Québec (1608-1970)*, Première annexe au rapport de la Commission d'étude sur les laïcs et l'Église, (Montréal: Fides, 1971), pp. 55-72.

¹⁵ Karl W. Deutsch and William J. Foltz, ed., *Nation-building*, (New York: Atherton Press, 1966).

¹⁶ See André-J. Bélanger, *L'Apolitisme des idéologies québécoises: le grand tournant de 1934-1936*, (Québec: Presses de l'Université Laval, 1974), pp. 3-5.

and French-Canadian nationalism.¹⁷ This modernization was certainly problematic. Critics drew attention to the gulf between the modern, multi-cultural, urban, industrial reality of Quebec society and a conservative Catholic ideology centred on rural values, ethnic solidarity, religion, and a rejection of politics and the state.¹⁸ These critics, including those who participated in the Catholic Action movements, grew suspicious of the traditional nationalism and some even rejected nationalism altogether.¹⁹

The rapid changes of the 1960s, known as the Quiet Revolution, grew directly out of the type of society that was formed in Quebec after 1867. After World War II, a “new middle class” of university trained bureaucrats increasingly occupied important positions in the immense bureaucracy that the Church had created. While educated in Catholic culture and values, members of this clerically dominated bureaucracy were simultaneously socialized into modern, rational and democratic values. Thus, they were uncomfortable with the conservative, undemocratic practices of the Duplessis regime and with the complicity of the Church in those practices.²⁰ They demanded the rationalization of the bureaucracy that oversaw education, health care, and social services. They also demanded its democratization and protested against its “clericalism,” understood as the best positions being reserved for Church officials.²¹ Consequently, the new nationalism was defined as much against the Catholic Church as the anglophone business elite.²²

The ascent to power of these elites was assured when the *Parti libéral du Québec* (PLQ) took power in June of 1960. Inspired by a secular and

¹⁷ See William F. Ryan S.J., *The Clergy and Economic Growth in Quebec, 1896-1914*, (Québec: Presses de l'Université Laval, 1966); Guindon, *Quebec Society*, pp. 107-109; and Hamelin et Gagnon, *Histoire du catholicisme*, p. 290.

¹⁸ The best known criticism of the Church's position was penned by Pierre Trudeau. See his “The province of Quebec at the time of the strike,” in *The Asbestos Strike*, ed. Pierre Trudeau, trans. James Boake, (Toronto: James Lewis and Samuel, 1974), pp. 1-81. See also Michael D. Behiels, *Prelude to Quebec's Quiet Revolution: Liberalism versus Neonationalism 1945-1960*, (Kingston and Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1985), p. 98-99.

¹⁹ Claude Ryan was representative of a whole generation of French Canadians who were critical of the old nationalism but did not reject nationalism itself. See his comments in “Nationalisme, Québec et fois,” *Cahiers de recherche éthique: 6: l'engagement politique*, dir. Rodrigue Bélanger, (Montréal: Fides, 1978), pp. 125-26 and Behiels, *Prelude to Quebec's Quiet Revolution*.

²⁰ Guindon, *Quebec Society*, pp. 21-24. See Kenneth McRoberts on the “new middle class” explanation for the sources of the Quiet Revolution; *Quebec: Social Change and Political Crisis*, (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1988, Third edition), pp. 147-69.

²¹ Guindon, *Quebec Society*, pp. 48-49. McRoberts, *Québec*, pp. 149-50.

²² McRoberts, *Québec*, pp. 148-51.

modernizing nationalism, the Lesage government introduced a number of measures that radically redefined the role of the state. It took over the functions of the Church in education, health care, and social services. Through the nationalization of hydro-electric utilities and the creation of crown corporations, the PLQ sought both to expand the influence of the government in the economy and to increase the presence of French Canadians in the upper levels of that economy.²³ The state bureaucracy increased at a tremendous rate, growing by 42.6 percent between 1960 and 1965.²⁴ While the changes adopted by the Lesage government mostly satisfied the interests of the new middle class and francophone business people, some sought to promote a more democratic, humane, and participatory society. The Liberal government introduced more progressive labour legislation and important social welfare reforms. Supporters of the government's reforms attacked both traditional religious nationalism and laissez-faire liberalism. In doing so they created a new political nationalism that was adamantly secular, state-centred, and optimistically oriented to Keynesian liberalism or even social democracy.²⁵

While accepting these reforms, Catholics attempted to find ways of adapting Church structures and Catholic thinking to the new context. Given the history and theology of the Catholic hierarchy in the 1950s, this reaction was by no means the obvious route to take. Even in the early 1960s, the bishops condemned the attack on traditional French Canadian nationalism in the very popular book, *Les insolences de Frère Untel*.²⁶ Even though, led by Cardinal Paul-Émile Léger, they had accepted the urbanization of Quebec society and reluctantly had given up the strategies of colonization and corporatism, the bishops' traditional paternalistic attitude, obedience to Rome, moralizing spirit, and confusion between Catholicism and conservative ideology had remained intact.²⁷ Yet by 1970, the bishops had largely reconciled themselves to the autonomy of the state, the liberty of individual consciences in political questions, and the legitimacy of the new nationalism. The early opposition and later reconciliation of the bishops was paralleled in many sectors in the Church.

This reconciliation would have been impossible without the coincidence of the Quiet Revolution with the Second Vatican Council. In Quebec, the Church's redefinition of its relationship to modernity had three immediate consequences. First, it took the wind out of the sails of the conservative

²³ *Ibid.*, pp. 132-34.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 136.

²⁵ Guindon, *Quebec Society*, pp. 40-43, 58; Léon Dion, *Nationalisme et politique au Québec*, (Montréal: Hurtubise HMH, 1975), pp. 54-119.

²⁶ Hamelin, *Histoire du catholicisme*, pp. 238-43.

²⁷ Jean Hamelin, "Société en mutation," p. 223.

rejection of the new society. It made the project of the traditional nationalists impossible – since the Church hierarchy now refused its designated role as spiritual and cultural leaders of the attack on modernity. Second, it allowed Catholics – and even clergy and bishops – to support some projects of the Quiet Revolution in spite of their “laicizing” agenda. Finally, it inspired a new concern for development and social justice among Quebec Catholics. The Council affirmed the new direction of Catholic social teaching laid out by Pope John XXIII. Catholics sought to remain relevant to Quebec society and to participate, as Christians, in the important struggles of their society. This new social teaching, along with the reflections of the Catholic Church in Latin America, would lead to the emergence of a faith and justice movement in the 1970s. Influenced by this teaching, the Church in Quebec could develop a sustained ethical critique of the new society and the new nationalism while affirming their liberating aspects. Taken together these three developments meant that Quebec society avoided the painful cultural schism between Catholics and modernizers (both liberal and radical) that has marked other Catholic societies.

Within the Quebec Church, there were varying reactions to the new society and its new nationalism. Many Quebecers were no more interested in the religious reforms of Vatican II than they were in the political reforms of the Quiet Revolution.²⁸ For example, rural Catholics remained loyal to the traditional religious nationalism and continued to support the *Union nationale*. When that party adopted a political programme similar to that of the PLQ, many of these voters shifted their support to the provincial wing of the Social Credit party, the *Ralliement créditiste*. The *Ralliement* wrestled with the question of independence and even absorbed two overtly independentist parties. While its conservative supporters were federalists, the party leaders pursued independence in order to protect the traditional social arrangement defined by religious nationalism from the incursions of the secular, modernizing, federal government.²⁹ The conservative, Catholic independence movements found allies within the Church in the pages of *Monde nouveau*, the journal of the Sulpician Institut Pie XI, which formed part of the faculty of theology at the Université de Montréal. In July 1965, *Monde nouveau* published an issue dedicated to separatism. Inspired by Lionel Groulx’s rejection of the new nationalism,³⁰ editor Père Guy Poisson

²⁸ For a discussion of the limited popular support for the reforms of the Liberal government of Jean Lesage, see McRoberts, *Québec*, pp. 169-72.

²⁹ In the 1930s, the *Ralliement* had adapted social credit philosophy to Catholic social teaching. See Paul-André Linteau, René Durocher, Jean-Claude Robert, et François Ricard, *Histoire du Québec contemporain. Tome 2. Le Québec depuis 1930*, (Montréal: Boréal, 1989), p. 128.

³⁰ For Groulx’s rejection of the Quiet Revolution see his *Chemins de l’avenir* (Montréal et Paris: Éditions Fides, 1964).

told Catholic activists to seize the levers of control of the new independentist movement because “an independence made without Christians will risk being made *against* the Church.”³¹

What was important about the Catholic nationalist groups and political parties which sought to redefine Quebec society along the lines of Catholic social teaching in the 1960s was that virtually all of them disappeared by 1970.³² Earlier in the twentieth century, nationalist movements had failed because they were politically irrelevant. In the 1960s, when the Catholic nationalist groups disintegrated, no new Catholic groups emerged to take their place, for they had become religiously as well as politically irrelevant. The Church no longer wanted to define its public presence in opposition to the new democratic society. Conservative Catholics who refused to adapt to the new society have limited their conceptualization of the public presence of the Church to its role in the school system, charity, community celebrations, pastoral services, and certain single-issue ethical debates such as abortion, pornography, and sexual morality. They have remained silent on the national question.³³

Not all those who rejected the new society and its new nationalism abandoned public life. After a long struggle, many conservatives came to accept the new state while maintaining their fidelity to the old nationalism. Particularly important voices were those of François-Albert Angers and the Jesuit priest Jean Genest who attacked the supposed anti-clericalism of the Quiet Revolution in the pages of *l'Action nationale*. They argued that the growth of the state represented a new form of dictatorship and a violation of the rights of the Church. In 1965, Angers wrote:

When the state is master in every domain, the people are masters in none.
The phrase, “We are the state!”, which we have not ceased repeating here,
is the greatest load of rubbish ever proposed to put the people to sleep and

³¹ Guy Poisson, P.S.S., “L’Indépendance du Québec,” *Monde nouveau*, 26, no. 6-7, (juin juillet, 1965): 219; emphasis in the original.

³² Besides the groups mentioned here one would include the *Ordre Jacques Cartier*, the *Alliance laurentienne*, the *Regroupement nationale*, the *Parti nationaliste chrétien*, and the *États généraux du Canada français*. For most of its supporters, the *États généraux* movement was a transitional experience from the traditionalist groups to insertion in the modern nationalist movement, i.e., the *Parti québécois*.

³³ It is important to remember that even these Catholics were not the most conservative groups in French Quebec society. For example, one group of Catholic *Créditistes*, the *Bérêts blancs*, felt that the social credit parties had already adapted themselves too much to secular society simply by offering candidates for election.

to give the dictatorial green light to all [government] ministers who are, by definition, budding little dictators.³⁴

Angers and Genest cast their arguments in nationalist terms: without the service of the Church, the nation was surely doomed to tyranny by the state on one hand and social and moral disintegration on the other. The sexual revolution, the feminist movement, and the youth culture of the 1960s, they thought, were surely signs of this degeneration.³⁵

This position was also taken by the Jesuit journal *Relations*. Père Richard Arès railed against the reforms as a violation of the democratic rights of French Canadians. He found Bill 60, which promised to secularize and modernize the school system especially threatening. In a 1964 editorial entitled “Le bill 60 et la démocratie totalitaire,” he argued that liberal democracy could become totalitarian because it sought to eliminate all intermediary bodies between the state and the individual. Naturally these bodies included the Church which, he argued, the Catholic families of Quebec had created and voluntarily put in charge of education, health care, and social services.³⁶ Led by a technocratic elite, totalitarian democracy would sweep away such democratically created, organic institutions and replace them with enormous, dehumanizing factory-schools which would create “citizens of the world” who would nevertheless be “rootless and interchangeable, neutral in mind and heart.”³⁷ Without Catholic schools, the nation was in peril of losing its culture, values, and spiritual orientation.

By the late 1960s, these conservatives were finally converted by the effectiveness of the new political nationalism. They translated their conservative values into a communitarian ethos that continued to inspire the *Mouvement national des Québécois* (formerly the *Fédération des Sociétés-St-Jean-Baptiste*), the journal *l'Action nationale*, and an important constituency within the *Parti québécois* (PQ). In the Church, they insisted that Catholicism maintain a public role and rejected the privatization of religion. They insisted that the Church be concerned with the national question and that it continue to contribute to Quebec culture. Conversely they also demanded that secular nationalist groups recognize the unique contribution that Catholicism had made to Quebec culture in the form of a communitarian ethos.

³⁴ “Hauteur et mauvaise foi envers nous de ‘l’État c’est nous!’” *L'Action nationale*, 55, no. 3, (novembre, 1965): 331. Translation by the author.

³⁵ Jean Genest, “Jusqu’à la lie?” *L'Action nationale*, 60, no. 3, (novembre 1970): p. 184.

³⁶ Richard Arès S.J., “Le bill 60 et la démocratie totalitaire,” *Relations*, no. 279, (mars 1964): pp. 65-66.

³⁷ Richard Arès S.J., “Le rapport Parent: I. – Approbations, réserves et inquiétudes,” *Relations*, no. 290, (février 1965): p. 35.

Conservative Catholics could not rally the rest of the Church behind their cause. On every important issue, from the debate on education reform to abortion, there was a Catholic presence on both sides of the issue. Consequently, it was impossible to identify Catholicism with the conservative rejection of the new society. For example, the contributors to the Dominican journal *Maintenant* consistently supported attempts to modernize Quebec society and reform the education system. Because of the role of the Church in supporting the Duplessis regime, contributors to *Maintenant* tied their criticism of the old Quebec to a criticism of the old Catholicism.³⁸ They rejected ultramontanism, which placed the Church over “the world” (that is the state and civil society), the clergy over the laity, and the spiritual over the material.³⁹ They demanded respect for the autonomy of political society, recognition of the rights of individual conscience, more democratic structures in the Church, and inter-religious dialogue. The writers of *Maintenant* declared that modernity and the new nationalism had a spiritual value for they allowed individuals to take responsibility for their lives and their faith and promoted autonomy and liberty, conditions that made religious commitment meaningful.

In September 1967, *Maintenant* declared itself in favour of independence and socialism. Citing the domination of the economy by foreign capital and the low rate of participation of francophones in the upper echelons of the Quebec economy, the editorial team of *Maintenant* argued that only state intervention would allow French Quebecers to participate in the definition of their society. The editor, a Dominican priest named Vincent Harvey, argued that they were searching for “a democratic socialism of participation.”⁴⁰ To use Fernand Dumont’s term, they sought to define “*un socialisme d’ici*,” that is, a socialism which would reflect the culture, values, and social reality of French Quebecers. While rooted in French Canadian reality, this nationalism could not be isolationist; independence had to represent a first step in opening up Quebecers to a new participation in the modern world.⁴¹

³⁸ For example, editorialists supported most of the recommendations of the Parent Report, tying the issue of religious liberty to the reform of the Church. See H.-M. Bradet O.P., “Vraies et fausses sécurités,” *Maintenant*, no. 21, (septembre 1963): pp. 253-56; and *Maintenant*, “Chrétienté hier, liberté demain,” *Maintenant*, no. 57, (septembre 1966): pp. 253-55.

³⁹ Typical of this new spirit were two editorials by Bradet, “Le monde moderne,” *Maintenant*, no. 7-8, (juillet-août 1962): 237-40 and “Pour une Église plus humaine,” *Maintenant*, no. 17, (mai 1963): pp. 145-48.

⁴⁰ Vincent Harvey, O.P., Pierre Saucier, Hélène Pelletier-Baillargeon, André Charbonneau, Louis Racine, et Yves Gosselin, “To be or not to be,” *Maintenant*, no. 68-69, (août-septembre 1967): p. 236.

⁴¹ Harvey et al., “To be or,” p. 237.

For *Maintenant*, independence and socialism also had spiritual meaning; they allowed people to take responsibility for their lives and their societies. Neither independence nor socialism were defined dogmatically. Instead the writers of *Maintenant* adopted a “*stratégie du provisoire*,” an open-ended strategy against all forms of injustice, including sexism, racism, imperialism, laissez-faire capitalism, and national oppression.⁴² This strategy was informed by a new eschatological imagination. Since perfection would come only after the return of the Messiah, all ideological systems were inadequate and partial, and all movements for social justice were flawed and somewhat self-interested.⁴³ Even their own analysis and political judgments were open to criticism. After 1970, the journal became more radical in its critique of society. The writers of *Maintenant* announced their support for the PQ’s left-of-centre programme in the elections of 1970 and 1973, but they were consistently critical of the party’s compromises and shortcomings.⁴⁴

The Jesuit journal *Relations* changed dramatically when most of the editorial team was replaced in 1969 and Père Irénée Desrochers became the editor. The new team rejected the conservatism of its predecessors and accepted the new society. It also became more sympathetic to the growing faith and justice movement within the Church. *Relations* dedicated itself to the theme of liberation, a term that had religious, social, and political meanings. Religiously, the Jesuits promoted the themes of democratization and reform within the Church, liberty of conscience, and new forms of Christian expression. Socially, the journal, an advocate of interventionist government and workers’ rights since its inception in 1941, became more radical. Politically, *Relations* adopted a socialist position. Besides becoming a forum for the network of Christian Marxists known as the *Réseau des politisés chrétiens*, the Jesuits reported on and welcomed the development of liberation theology in Latin America and the ecclesial documents it inspired.

⁴² Hélène Pelletier-Baillargeon, “*Maintenant* ‘73: la sincérité du provisoire,” *Maintenant*, no. 127, (juin-juillet, 1973): pp. 4-6.

⁴³ The editors of *Maintenant* followed the developments of political theology in Europe and were influenced by the French Dominican Christian Duquoc on this issue. See Christian Duquoc, “Christianisme et politique,” *Maintenant*, no. 81, (novembre-décembre 1968): 25962. And compare Vincent Harvey O.P., “Agir ici et maintenant,” *Maintenant*, no 120-121, (décembre 1972): pp. 35-36.

⁴⁴ While *Maintenant* consistently identified itself as a Catholic journal, its status had changed over its short life. In 1965, the editor Père H.-M. Bradet was removed by the head of the Dominican order for his criticism of the Church’s continuing conservatism. His replacement, Père Vincent Harvey O.P., turned out to be even more radical than Bradet. In 1969, the Dominicans dropped their affiliation with and financial support of the journal because they felt it was oriented too much to secular society and politics and not enough to religious issues. The journal continued to act as an important forum for progressive Catholics who supported the “participationiste” wing of the PQ.

When they turned their socialist analysis to the situation of French Quebecers, the writers of *Relations* applied the insights of liberation theology and the Church's new social teaching. Of course, they did not consider French Quebecers to be colonized or oppressed to the same degree or in the same manner as aboriginal peoples or poor nations. But the writers of *Relations* did judge that the teaching outlined in the 1971 World Synod of Bishops' document *Justice in the World* on the rights of peoples to development, self-determination, and social justice was relevant to the situation of French Quebecers.⁴⁵ In 1973 the editorial team of *Relations* declared its support for independence but only if it was tied to "the construction of a new type of society and to the blossoming of a real community."⁴⁶ Political independence was a first, necessary, but not sufficient, step towards the construction of a socialist society.

After a purge of the more radical element on the editorial board in 1976, *Relations* adopted a more reform-oriented, social-democratic position. However, it never wavered in its support for the transformation of Quebec society and for the right of Quebecers to self-determination. The journal welcomed the 1980 referendum as a step towards a more participatory society; the democratic procedure in itself, they believed, served the common good. The staff supported a "yes" vote for several reasons. First they believed that sovereignty could be the first step towards building a more egalitarian and open society. Second, they wanted to lend their support to progressive groups in Quebec society – especially the labour unions and popular action groups – who saw the referendum as the best chance at democratizing Quebec's political institutions and transforming its socioeconomic structures.⁴⁷ Finally, they wanted to send a message to English Canadians that Quebecers were not happy with the constitutional status quo. A yes vote would lead to more equal, just, and friendlier relations with the rest of Canada.⁴⁸

⁴⁵ The editor Irénée Desrochers S.J. argued that the right to self-determination of Quebecers was a moral right that preceded political frameworks and constitutional negotiations. See "Le principe du droit à l'autodétermination du Québec: amorçe d'une réflexion pré-politique," *Relations*, no. 366, (décembre 1971): 334-37; and "Le droit du Québec à l'autodétermination: les évêques se sont-ils prononcés?" *Relations*, no. 372, (juin 1972): pp. 163-68.

⁴⁶ *Relations*, "Relations et l'avenir du Québec," *Relations*, no. 386, (octobre 1973): 259; emphasis in the original.

⁴⁷ Irénée Desrochers S.J., "La FTQ et le référendum," *Relations*, no. 455, (janvier 1980): 11-14; "Le référendum et la question sociale," *Relations*, no. 457, (mars 1980): 67, 9395; "La CSN, la question nationale et le oui au référendum," *Relations*, no. 459, (mai 1980): pp. 155-57.

⁴⁸ Albert Beaudry, "Le référendum: un pas dans la bonne direction," *Relations*, no. 459, (mai 1980): pp. 131-33.

The 1980 referendum was also the catalyst that induced the most important contributions by the Quebec bishops to the national question. The pastoral letters of the *Assemblée des évêques du Québec*, released in the months before the May vote, reflected the bishops' new attitude to secular Quebec. The mood created by the Second Vatican Council had encouraged them to rethink the relationship of the Church to society and of the laity to the hierarchy. An important step in this evolution had been the creation of the *Commission d'étude sur les laïcs et l'Église* in 1968. The Dumont Commission, as it was known, firmly rejected the old Church and old Quebec and accepted the disestablishment of the Church in the Quiet Revolution as an irreversible development. It argued that the Church would have to become a "*compagnon de route*" with the people of Quebec.⁴⁹ This was a radical change from the ultramontanist view of the 1950s, which saw the institutional church as the framework of the *Église-nation*. According to the report, the Church would have to serve Quebec society while adopting a critical or prophetic stance towards its injustices. Influenced by liberation theology and the papal teaching on social justice, the bishops became critics of Quebec society, calling society and the state to task on such issues as unemployment, regional disparity, aboriginal rights, the plight of refugees and immigrants, the environment, and others.⁵⁰

The bishops released two widely-read and well-received letters during the referendum debate. In their first letter, they affirmed the right of the people of Quebec to determine their future collectively and the responsibility to decide important questions about their development democratically. They also insisted that nationalism had to be respectful of individual and community rights and defined "*le peuple québécois*" as all residents of Quebec, including French Quebecers, anglophones, immigrant minority groups, and the aboriginal peoples. Furthermore, they hoped to foster an atmosphere of respect and tolerance and warned against the demonization of one's opponents, ethnic isolationism, prejudice and stereotyping, insulting rhetoric, and discriminatory practices.⁵¹ Finally, they argued that the national question could not be abstracted from the search to create a more just social order in Quebec and the world.⁵² Five months later, in a second letter, they outlined their vision of a just society as one that would be open to

⁴⁹ Commission d'étude sur les laïcs et l'Église, *L'Église du Québec: un héritage, un projet*, (Montréal, Fides, 1971).

⁵⁰ Many of the important letters on these issues have been collected by Gérard Rochais in *La justice sociale comme bonne nouvelle: messages sociaux, économiques et politiques des évêques du Québec 1972-1983*, (Montréal: Bellarmin, 1984).

⁵¹ Baum, *The Church in Quebec*, p. 164.

⁵² "Le peuple québécois et son avenir politique: message de l'Assemblée des évêques du Québec, sur l'évolution de la société québécoise, le 15 août 1979," dans Rochais, *La justice sociale*, pp. 137- 44.

participation by all citizens, balance the rights and duties of persons in light of the common good, ensure an equitable distribution of goods and responsibilities, and encourage solidarity among peoples in the international community. Nationalism, they argued, should not encourage people to close in on themselves nor to act solely out of collective self-interest.⁵³

The style of the bishops' teaching on nationalism was just as important as its content. The bishops stated that, while the Church affirmed Quebecers' right to self-determination, the hierarchy did not have the authority to tell them how to vote. The right to self-determination did not automatically dictate any particular political framework. Neither sovereignty-association nor federalism could be identified directly with the gospel message of liberty and responsibility. The role of the Church was to defend basic Christian values, which demanded that people decide their future in a mature, respectful, fraternal, and peaceful manner.⁵⁴ During the referendum campaign itself, the bishops ensured that the Church was not identified with either side. They warned the clergy to remain discrete; they could take sides but they had to present their opinions as their own and not as the Church's.⁵⁵

While the principles laid out by the bishops may have been violated by individuals during the heat of the 1980 referendum debate, Catholic groups and institutions were remarkably disciplined during the campaign and consistent in emphasizing that their choices were based on political analyses that were open to democratic debate.⁵⁶ The style of their participation reflected a consensus on the Church's new attitude to secular Quebec and its new nationalism, which affirmed that the people of Quebec had the right to determine their own future through the democratic process and neither outsiders nor the Church itself could interfere. By taking this position, the Church affirmed the fact of its political and social "disestablishment" and accepted that the old Quebec had passed away. During the referendum, and

⁵³ "Construire ensemble une société meilleure: deuxième message de l'Assemblée des évêques du Québec sur l'évolution politique de la société québécoise, le 9 janvier 1980," dans Rochais, *La justice sociale*, pp. 145-46.

⁵⁴ Assemblée des évêques du Québec, "Le peuple québécois," dans Rochais, *La justice sociale*, pp. 137-44.

⁵⁵ The press noted the efforts of the bishops to assure that neither sovereignists nor federalists within the Church claimed that Christian values directly demanded support for their position, i.e., that Christian love and unity required people to vote no or that the Gospel message of liberation required people to vote yes. See Jean Martel, "L'Église se fera discrète," *Le Soleil*, 26 avril 1980, B2; and Jules Béliveau, "Mgr Grégoire est satisfait de la discrétion des prêtres," *La Presse*, 9 mai 1980, A12.

⁵⁶ For typical examples of the participation of the Catholic groups in this debate, see *Dossiers* "Vie ouvrière," "Oui à un projet de société," *Dossiers* "Vie ouvrière," 30, 141, (janvier 1980): 2-9 and Mouvement des travailleurs chrétiens, *La question nationale*, (Montréal: Mouvement des travailleurs chrétiens, 1979).

perhaps for the first time in Quebec political history, no group sought to define Quebec as a Catholic society or proposed that Catholicism could provide a political culture or economic system for a pluralist, modern, industrial society. While this separation of church and state was affirmed, no major Catholic groups supported the separation of the Church from Quebec society – either in the form of creating a Catholic ghetto (as in France after its secularizing revolution) or in allowing Catholicism to be defined as a purely private religion. Because of the Church’s long history at the very centre of French Canadian civil society, Catholics felt that the Church had to maintain a public presence. In the introduction and conclusion of their first letter on the 1980 referendum, the bishops made it clear that their commitment to Quebec society transcended any political framework that Quebecers might choose.⁵⁷

In reaction to the new society and its nationalism, the Church maintained its moral authority and public presence by creating a sustained ethical critique that integrated its traditional commitment to Quebec society with the new social teaching coming from Rome, Europe, and Latin America. Nationalist claims had to be measured against two sets of criteria. The first was supplied by the Catholic teaching on the “common good.” Did a nationalist movement promote the welfare of all citizens and not just one group? Was it democratic? Did it encourage mature, responsible citizenship and a balance between the rights and duties of individuals? Did it promote isolationism, racism, or xenophobia? The second was supplied by the new Catholic teaching on social justice. What was the “*projet de société*” attached to the nationalist movement? Did the nationalist project respect the rights of minorities and of the aboriginal peoples? Did it seek to create a more just distribution of wealth? Was it open to participation by the poor and the marginalized? Would it promote a more just and open society? This position, while interpreted differently, was taken seriously by every Catholic group active in the nationalist debate after 1970.

The teaching carried an explicit limitation of the public role and authority of the Church itself. Even the Church could not define itself above the Christian values that it now recognized as inherent in the democratic process. The Church could, however, remind society of its commitment to

⁵⁷ The Quebec bishops reaffirmed the position taken by the Canadian Catholic Conference (of which they were members) in its 1972 pastoral letter on Quebec politics. The Canadian bishops stated that “all options which respect the human person and the human community are a matter of free choice on the individual as well as the community level.” See Canadian Catholic Conference, “On pastoral implications of political choices, (21 April 1972),” in *Do Justice! The Social Teaching of the Canadian Catholic Bishops, 1945-1986*, ed. E.F. Sheridan S.J., (Toronto: Jesuit Centre for Social Faith and Justice, 1987), pp. 230-32.

democracy and denounce attitudes and practices that ignored the dignity and rights of individuals and communities. This teaching represented a dramatic turnabout of the Church's attitude to the democratic process. Catholics affirmed that even the heated and sometimes divisive debate around the 1980 referendum was a positive process in and of itself. The debate encouraged a "*prise de conscience*," an awakening to one's dignity, responsibility, and liberty as a citizen and person. In a society that Catholics had analyzed as encouraging people to become self-interested, depoliticized consumers, the nationalist debate came to be seen as encouraging serious reflection on issues of identity, common values, solidarity, and social justice.⁵⁸

The Church's support for democratic participation, responsible citizenship, and individual liberty was remarkable when contrasted with its former opposition to those very features of modernity. It was the religious revolution inspired by Vatican II, the emergence of a faith and justice movement, and the struggles of Quebeckers, that allowed the Church to adapt to the secular society created by the Quiet Revolution. This extraordinary shift leads to the conclusion that "centuries – not decades" – separate the Church of Quebec of the 1980s from that of the 1950s.

⁵⁸ Jacques Grand'Maison, *Nationalisme et religion. Tome 2. Religion et idéologies politiques*, (Montréal: Beauchemin, 1970), pp. 200-201.