

Closing in action.
Towards a Polarisation around the Future and Memory of Catholicism in Québec?
Ethnography and Media Analysis of three Notable Church Closures
at the beginning of the 21st century

Ryan Lux

A dissertation submitted to the University of Ottawa in partial fulfillment
of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

School of Sociological and Anthropological Studies
Faculty of Social Sciences
University of Ottawa

© Ryan Lux, Ottawa, Canada, 2026

For my mother, Donna Lux, thank you for your patience and support.

Abstract: This thesis analyses three conflictual Catholic church closures in Québec (2013–2015)—in Rimouski (Saint-Germain-de-Rimouski), Québec City (Saint-Jean-Baptiste-de-Québec), and near by Drummondville (Saint-Edmond-de-Grantham)—selected from more than 600 cases to capture urban, regional, and rural contexts, using immersive ethnography to understand actors’ competing logics. It examines secularization in the 21st century, highlighting a shift from lived religion to religious memory, and explores how religion and heritage intertwine as churches close. The study emphasizes *how* communities negotiate closures rather than *why*, showing that each case mobilizes religious, civic, and political forces. Ultimately, it argues that Québec is undergoing a profound sociocultural transformation marked by both accelerated secularization and an intensifying polarization around the future and memory of Catholicism.

Résumé: Cette thèse analyse trois fermetures conflictuelles d'églises catholiques au Québec (2013-2015) — à Rimouski (Saint-Germain-de-Rimouski), à Québec (Saint-Jean-Baptiste-de-Québec) et près de Drummondville (Saint-Edmond-de-Grantham) – sélectionnées parmi plus de 600 cas, afin de refléter les contextes urbains, régionaux et ruraux, et ce, en utilisant l'ethnographie immersive pour comprendre les logiques concurrentes des acteurs. Elle examine la sécularisation au XXI^e siècle, en soulignant le passage de la religion vécue à la mémoire religieuse, et explore la manière dont la religion et le patrimoine s'entremêlent à mesure que les églises ferment. L'étude met l'accent sur la manière dont les communautés négocient les fermetures plutôt que sur les raisons qui les motivent, montrant que chaque cas mobilise des forces religieuses, civiques et politiques. En fin de compte, l'auteur soutient que le Québec connaît une profonde transformation socioculturelle marquée à la fois par une sécularisation accélérée et une polarisation croissante autour de l'avenir et de la mémoire du catholicisme.

Synopsis: This thesis examines three examples of Catholic church closure in Québec that took place between 2013 and 2015. Before embarking on this research, the author analysed more than 600 church closures and selected representative conflictual closures in urban, regional, and rural contexts. Conflictual cases raise the most issues. The author visited each site as long as it needs to meet with the key players identified in advance through local media coverage of the church closures.

Living amongst research participants, in their community, attending Mass with them, taking meal and coffee with hundreds of them and listening to their grievances and rationales provided rich context. Having done so, it was possible to understand their competing logics. The goal of this research is to understand the closing of these churches in action, in considering positions of the pro's and of the con's and understand the historical, social and cultural dynamic behind this phenomenon in Contemporary Québec. Research took place in Rimouski where Saint-Germain-de-Rimouski, their cathedral was shuttered, Saint-Jean-Baptiste-de-Québec, which was closed, and Saint-Edmond-de-Grantham, which was demolished.

This thesis explores on the field the concept of secularisation and its evolution in the 21st century through the tension between cultural religion, exculturation and secularisation. The observations suggest a seismic shift in the socioreligious order in Québec, a departure from a religiously coloured culture to one increasingly of religious memory.

Religion as heritage and heritage as religion are interesting concepts that are explored in the pages that follow. What is left of religion and why do we want to save its traces? Religious heritage in Québec is a major public issue that draws in religion, civil society, and politics every time a church closes. This thesis is devoted to asking more how than why. This work is an observation of a social shift and an effort to make sense of it. It shows, among other, that Québec is now launched more and more towards a Polarisation around the Future and Memory of Catholicism in Contemporary Québec.

Table of Contents

I.	Acknowledgments.....	xiii
II.	Introduction: Closing churches in Quebec: an historical comparative perspective	1
A.	An Elusive Phenomenon in Plain View	1
1.	Outsider Impressions: Quebec's Church Closure Particularity.....	3
2.	International Secularism Regimes: A Determining Factor of Closure	7
3.	Quebec's Church-State Arrangement: A unique civil status.	16
B.	The Church and the French-Canadian National Reference.....	17
1.	Modernist Duplication, Strict vs. Open Secularism: 1960–1980	20
2.	Referential Reformulations: Revisionist Narrative Inversions:1980-2000	26
3.	Reconfiguration: The Beginning of the End of Cultural Catholicism	30
C.	From Cultural Religion to Religious Heritage.....	37
1.	Québec Discovers Religious Heritage	37
2.	Religious Heritage: ad intra	42
3.	Politicisation: ad extra	52
4.	Examples of Interpretations from Other Fields.....	55
D.	Research Questions.	56
E.	Theoretical contextualisation.	59
1.	Classical Theory Under a Contemporary Light	59
2.	Secularisation	60
3.	Vicarious Religion: The British face of the Quebec Church.	65
4.	Exculturation: breakdown of a 50-year socio-religious consensus.	67
5.	Disaffiliation and the Rise of Religious Heritage	70
6.	Social church closure: roles and relations.	72
F.	Methodology	74
1.	Research Subject: Church Closure.....	75
2.	Textual Research: Media and Archival Analysis	77
3.	Media Content Analysis.....	78
4.	Key Interviews	80
G.	Limitations:.....	83
III.	Case One, Description of Cathedral Saint-Germain of Rimouski	87
A.	Introduction: exemplarity in singularity	87

B.	1967 – November 27, 2014: Renovations, heritage status and closure.	90
1.	Heritage Status Machinations: 1967-2005	90
2.	Parish Fusions: 2004-2006.....	92
3.	Appeals: 2011-2014.....	93
4.	Best-Laid-Plans of Mice and Men Often Go Awry: 2014-2016.....	97
C.	The Rise and fall of Committee Cathedral 1862: November 28, 2014 – January 2017	103
1.	The unexpected loss of a conciliatory force	104
2.	Committee 1862: A forgone conclusion?	105
3.	Committee 2016: a Non-transformative Approach	113
4.	Usurpation and Revolt.....	118
D.	January 2017 – April 19, 2018: Mutual Manoeuvring.....	122
1.	The Gift of the Trojan Horse	122
2.	Public Consultations: Summer and Autumn 2017.....	125
3.	Renewed Urgency.....	128
4.	Vox Populi: Léger Survey	129
5.	A Local Commission	130
6.	Reaction to Consultations:	132
E.	Manoeuvres and Perceptions of the Other: Autumn 2017-April 2018	134
1.	Political Tactics	134
2.	Ecclesiastical Tactics	135
3.	Grassroots Civil Society Tactics.....	137
4.	Parish Council Tactics	139
F.	Conclusion: April 20, 2018, to April 24, 2020	144
1.	Decree.....	144
2.	From the Media to the Courts.....	148
IV.	Chapter 2: Analysis of Cathedral Saint-Germain of Rimouski.....	157
A.	Introduction: The Densest Example of Church Closure	157
B.	Points of Convergence: the historical significance of Catholicism and the cathedral for identity production	160
1.	An Uncontested History	161
2.	Shared Memory: Understandings of the Cathedral as a Reference.....	162
3.	Cultural Change: a multivocal account of a shared narrative	169
4.	Accepted Problem, Contested Responses.....	174

C.	Authority and Leadership: The Hot Potato Approach	175
1.	Clerical Leadership.....	175
2.	Political Leadership.....	178
3.	Civil Society Leadership	179
4.	An Inability to Cooperate	180
D.	Institutional Dynamics: A Total Dismantlement	181
1.	Fusions and Closures	182
2.	Les Guerres de clochers or “Turf Wars”	183
3.	Religious Practice: Closure-Accelerated Decline	184
4.	Ecclesiastical Status: The Cathedral Difference.....	187
5.	Two Unreconcilable Responses to a Church in Flux	189
E.	Law and Policy	191
1.	Heritage Status: An Opaque Bureaucratic Affair.....	191
2.	The Parish Law	193
3.	Official Secularism: Bill 21	196
4.	A Perfect Storm for Public Religion	200
F.	Politics: Who should pay?	201
1.	Citizen Perspective	201
2.	Political Perspective.....	201
3.	Clergy Perspective	203
4.	Civil Society Perspective	204
5.	A Standoff	207
G.	Assessment of Conflict	208
1.	Clergy	208
2.	Grassroots Civil Society	212
3.	Institutional Civil Society.	217
4.	Politicians.....	219
5.	Social Cartography of a Church Closure	221
H.	Conclusion	222
1.	Discussion: Interview Subjects as Personalities or Figures	223
2.	Polarisation: The Question of Sacrality	225
3.	Three Possible Outcomes	230
4.	Significance for the local and National Church.....	237

V.	Chapter Three, Description of Saint-Jean-Baptiste de Québec.....	246
A.	Introduction.....	246
B.	Periodisation	247
1.	Concerned Confidence: leading up to the 1990s	247
2.	Towards a New Millennium: A Marriage of Convenience, 1999-2004	253
3.	Policy Developments: 2005-2006, a National Commission on Religious Heritage	258
4.	Death Rattle: 2007-2015	265
C.	Shock Treatment 2015: reactions to a charlatan cure.	267
1.	Announcement and Initial Reaction: February 2015	268
2.	Parishioners' and Clergy's Reactions:.....	269
3.	Governments' Reactions	272
4.	Civil Society Reactions:	274
5.	Last Mass	279
D.	Religious Heritage Funding Re-examined: 2016-2020.....	280
1.	Religious Heritage Conference	280
2.	John Porter Committee	283
3.	Malaise	288
E.	Conclusion: From Malaise to Renewal.....	290
1.	Views on the Institutional Religion.....	294
2.	Views on Religious Heritage	295
3.	Political Views.....	296
4.	Civil Society.....	296
VI.	Chapter 4, Case II, Analysis of Saint-Jean-Baptiste-de-Québec Closure	299
A.	Introduction.....	299
B.	Saint-Jean-Baptiste's religious life	306
1.	Attempts to Revitalise: Pre-closure.....	307
2.	The Rites of Closure	312
3.	Saints-Martyrs-Canadiens: A Marriage of Convenience.....	315
C.	Saint-Jean-Baptiste's Community Life.....	318
1.	Charitable Life of the Church Basement.....	319
2.	Metronome of Neighbourhood Life Muted	323
3.	Civil Society Response to Closure	324
D.	Saint-Jean-Baptiste's National Life: Outward Representations.....	332

1.	On the trouble with exceptionality: or the experts vs. decision-makers' Gordian knot.	336
2.	National allure, local funds: an incongruent religious heritage regulatory framework.....	340
E.	A Precedent of National Proportions: The Question of Second Sons.....	343
1.	From a Public to Private Church: An Institutional Precedent.....	344
2.	Saint-Jean-Baptiste: A State Precedent.....	357
F.	Concluding thoughts: assessment of stand-off.....	379
1.	Worst Case Scenario: Continued Impasse or Demolition.....	380
2.	Do-Over: More consultation and co-operation.....	382
3.	Best-Case Scenario: Mixed-use and Mixed Governance.	384
4.	Typology of Saint-Jean-Baptiste: Continuity and Contrast with Rimouski.	388
VII.	Chapter 5: Case III, Description of Saint-Edmond-de-Grantham.....	393
A.	Introduction.....	393
1.	An historical accident of governance and demography.....	394
2.	Grotto to Our Lady of Lourdes: A Collective Manifestation.....	395
3.	Centre of Community Life	397
B.	Contemplating Closure: Old Stock vs New Arrivals (September 2012-October 2016)	398
1.	Old Stock Brokerage: Cooperating to Save the Church.....	399
2.	Change of Fortune: Anti-spending Grassroots Opposition	400
3.	Political Machinations and Clan Mentality.....	403
C.	Robert Corriveau: The Developer's Pawn.....	405
1.	Down but not out: the Old Stock had one trick left up their sleeves.....	406
2.	Fall Elections 2017: Faction Face-Off.....	409
3.	Changing of the Guard: Newcomers' Election Sweep.....	413
VIII.	Chapter Six, Case II: Analysis of Saint-Edmond-de-Grantham	418
A.	Introduction.....	418
1.	First Impressions of an Unwelcome Outsider	419
2.	Field work: A Regional Solution to Logistical Problems.....	420
B.	History and Development: a territorial sociology.....	422
1.	Unification and Consolidation	422
2.	Suburban Development and Hardening of Clan Mentalities: 1980s.....	427
3.	Two Tales of One Village: Oppositional Worldviews.....	431
C.	Religious Transformation of a Catholic bastion	440
1.	Portrait of How a Country Parish Can Disappear	440

2.	A Difficult Marriage: Parish Fusion	444
3.	Passing the Torch and Extinguishment.....	446
4.	Weathering the Secular Storm: The Surprising Stability of Nicolet.....	449
D.	Political Sphere: a religious heritage microcosm.....	451
1.	Consensus or Echo Chamber	451
2.	A Startling Majority Speaks: Grassroots Anti-conservation	454
3.	Three votes one issue: La Guerre d'un Clocher.....	458
4.	The Fall of Saint-Edmond's: Reactions to Demolition	467
E.	Bitter Consequences: Demolition's Social Cost	470
1.	Loss of Community	470
2.	De-politicisation.....	471
3.	De-institutionalisation	473
F.	Aberrant or Axiological? A typological gaze	475
1.	Religious Domain	476
2.	Civil Society Domain	479
3.	Political Domain.....	485
G.	Conclusion: Indications for Cultural Change.....	487
IX.	Conclusion: the social dynamics and foundations of Catholic church closure in Quebec in the beginning of the 21st Century.....	491
A.	Church Closure Participants: Dramas With Six Roles.....	493
1.	Modernist Catholics.....	494
2.	Traditionalist Catholics	494
3.	Institutional Civil Society	494
4.	Grassroots Civil Society,.....	494
5.	Strict Secularist Politicians.....	495
6.	Open Secularist Politicians	495
B.	Socioreligious Similarities: Common Elements of Religious Conflict.....	495
1.	Institutional factors	496
2.	Religious Offer	496
C.	Socioreligious Differences: contextual religious inflections of a general pattern of fusion and closure.....	497
1.	Demographics and Religious Differences	497
2.	Guerre des clochers: Geographic and Cultural factors of fusion	498
3.	Effect on Practice.....	500

4.	Financial Relationship.....	500
5.	Experience of Closure.....	501
6.	Different battlefields, the same munitions.	501
D.	Civic Similarities: A Nation of Parishes.....	502
1.	High Levels of Attachment and Identification.....	503
2.	High degrees of participation in Church Closure.....	504
3.	Secular Interests: Quebec particularism and memory.....	505
E.	Civil Society Differences: splitting hairs.....	505
F.	Political Similarities: Congruous mobilisation of identity.....	506
1.	Opportunistic non-interference.....	509
2.	Popular election issues.....	511
3.	Municipal.....	513
G.	Political Differences: Pork Barrel Politics.....	513
1.	Leadership: The Understanding of General Moods.....	513
2.	Social Domains as Arenas of Conflict.....	514
H.	Social Domains: Exemplary cases of three socioreligious logics.....	514
1.	Political Sphere: A National Question.....	514
2.	Religious Sphere: An Ecclesiological Question.....	515
3.	Civil Society: A local Question.....	515
I.	Policy Recommendations: What Conflictual Churches Can Teach Each Domain About Themselves	516
1.	Religious sphere:	516
2.	Political sphere:	517
3.	Civil Society.....	518
J.	Methodological Choices and Results.....	519
1.	Progressive secularisation.....	520
2.	Modern Trajectories.....	521
3.	Vicarious religion.....	523
4.	Exculturation.....	524
5.	Religious Privatisation and Social Closure.....	526
6.	Patrimonialised Religion: A new configuration?	527
X.	Bibliography.....	530

Table of Figures

Figure 1 Saint-Germain-de-Rimouski.....	88
Figure 2 First Mass after re-opening.....	161
Figure 3 Trajectories of Modern Religion.....	246
Figure 4 Saint-Jean-Baptiste-de-Québec.....	251
Figure 5 The Crossroads Project.....	298
Figure 6 Saint-Jean-Baptiste Aerial View.	304
Figure 7 Saint-Edmond-de-Grantham.....	399
Figure 8 The Demolition of Saint-Edmond-de-Grantham.....	424

I. Acknowledgments

The University of Ottawa is one of the few porous boundaries between the two solitudes. I arrived thoroughly English Canadian, but the opportunity to study in French, participate in Francophone institutions, and work in Francophone intellectual spaces opened me up to a world I did not know existed. So, firstly, I salute the University and its project. Secondly, I am so grateful to all my research participants. They shared their precious time and, more importantly, frank assessments of painful moments in their lives. Without their openness, this on-the-record thesis would have been impossible. Several among them were integral to finding subjects, including Jacques Landry, Father Pierre Gingras, and Aliette Lajoie and Father Dubois.

I thank Anne Trépanier for believing in me from the early days of my master's and for deepening my love for Quebec, and for having encouraged me to pursue my sincere interest in Quebec culture. Anne played a decisive role in securing my funding all the way through my thesis, linked me with E.-Martin Meunier, my supervisor and mentor. In the same vein, I extend my thanks to Lise-Nathalie Gagnon for helping me to improve my French.

Institutionally, I would first like to acknowledge Marie-Pier Robert-Pagette, without whom I would have never managed. Her patience and administrative generosity are very much appreciated. I would also like to highlight The Centre for Interdisciplinary Research on Citizenship and Minorities (CIRCEM), which fosters intercultural dialogue, and which was the first group I had the courage to attend as an Anglophone. It was a welcoming and intellectually challenging space that reminded me that ideas are not milestones but nourishment. Moreover, I would like to thank the *Collège des chaires de recherches sur le monde francophone* for their support. I would likewise like to thank Lucie Hotte for welcoming me into the *Centre de Recherche en Francophonies Canadiennes* with open arms. I would also like to thank the Dominicans of the Saint-Jean-Baptiste

monastery for giving me shelter, friendship, intellectual stimulation, and gardening, particularly, Fathers Louis Roy, Michel Gourgues, Guy Rivard, and, of course, Father Antonio De Sousa.

In terms of research opportunities, I must thank Anne Trépanier for my first research assistant position, which led to invaluable projects with E.-Martin Meunier, Brieg Capitaine, and Martine Lagacé. Through them I learned new research skills and theoretical approaches. I treasure those experiences.

I would be remiss not to recognise the integral support provided by the various grant-awarding organisations, which made my education and research possible. Thanks to the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council, Ontario Graduate Scholarships, and the Maurice Lévesque Fellowship for Finishing Doctoral Candidate for their generous support. Without this help it would have been impossible to make ends meet or even consider further studies.

Because studying is solitary activity, it is likewise important to acknowledge the friendships that have been a support. I would like to thank my sister, Erin Lux, who helped me get through my first year via many late-night phone calls. Second, my dear friends Claire and Spencer, whose friendship means the world to me, and Breen and Michelle and Jennifer and Ray, whom I can always depend on. Lastly, and most importantly, there really is no way to properly thank my mother, Donna Lux, without whom none of this would have been possible.

Finally, is there a way to thank my supervisor adequately? I'm not sure. When I first arrived in his office, I did not speak French, knew nothing of Sociology, and very little about the discipline necessary to be a good scholar. M. Meunier has gone above and beyond in all manners of supervision. His thoughtful pedagogy, keen interest, and firm standards have transformed me.

All I can say is a heartfelt thank you.

Ryan

II. Introduction: Closing churches in Quebec: an historical comparative perspective

For outsiders visiting Quebec, the Nation's churches have long been a source of fascination. In 1881, speaking in Montreal, American author Mark Twain famously remarked that it was the first city he had visited where he could not throw a brick without breaking a church window¹. Like Twain, Quebec's churches have always made an impression on me, but of what is hard to say exactly. There are, of course, the usual reasons: their imposing majesty, which often stands in dramatic contrast to their humble surroundings; the haunting music of their bells and organs; the otherworldly character of their architecture and ornamentation; the gravitas they inspire among even the most incredulous; or the poetry of the liturgy and devotion of their adherents. It is, of course, all of that, but these qualities are shared by their homologues all over the world, but somehow, Quebec's churches seem to speak in a register all their own that only becomes audible when they close or are threatened with closure. To contextualise the three examples of Quebec church closure, this introduction will address early perceptions of the phenomenon, international examples, the relationship between Church and State, religion's role in the Nation, and the transformation of the Church into heritage. Following the literature and historiographical review of the social role of Quebec's francophone Catholic churches and the structural causes and reactions to their closures, we will proceed to examine three exemplary cases which represent the social fruition of the admittedly long but equally necessary prologue.

A. An Elusive Phenomenon in Plain View

Identity is in question in Quebec, where churches have remained familiar physical and cultural landmarks and touchstones despite an orthodox mythology of triumphant secularism and

¹ See Mark Twain, "Mark Twain in Montreal", *The New York Times*, December 10, 1881.

modernity over the sacred and tradition. Most high school students could cite the famous formula consecrated by the duality of the ‘Great Darkness,’ representing the period dominated by the clergy and conservative politicians, on the one hand, and its counterpart, the liberation unleashed by the Quiet Revolution, marked by the election of the Liberals and the secularisation or ‘modernisation’ of social welfare². Even in this type of society, which proudly professes its secularism, the least practising participants consulted over the course of my research admitted that churches invariably activate their senses. The sights, sounds, smells, textures and even tastes of churches can instantly evoke a constellation of memories and representations for all but the most recent vintage of Francophone Quebecers who identify with the French-Canadian *ethnie*. Imagine then the scale and depth of the phenomenon unleashed by their widespread and sudden disappearance. The Catholic Church is an institution of which almost every French-speaking Quebecer over the age of 35 is, at least nominally, a member based on studies of sacramental participation between the 1970s to 2011 which show a stable rate of between 75 and 80 per cent until 2001, when schools stopped making sacraments automatic and taught in school³. That is millions of people for whom the Church is at least an important cultural reference endowed with powerful significations of their history and identity as a collectivity, whether from direct or mediated experience.

Perhaps the reason the universal numinous sense⁴ is heightened by Quebec’s churches is the critical role it played in French-Canadian mythology and history, by ensuring the protection and

² See E.-Martin Meunier & Jean-Philippe Warren, *Sortir de la « Grande noirceur ». L’horizon « personnaliste » de la Révolution tranquille*, Quebec City, Les Éditions du Septentrion, 2002.

³ See Meunier, E.-Martin & Sarah Wilkins-Laflamme, « Sécularisation, Catholicisme et transformation du régime de religiosité au Québec. Étude comparative avec le Catholicisme au Canada (1968-2007) », *Recherches Sociographiques*, 52(3), 2011, p. 683–729, <https://www.erudit.org/fr/revues/rs/2011-v52-n3-rs5005802/1007655ar.pdf>.

⁴ A concept first identified by Rudolf Otto to describe experiences which arouse spiritual or religious emotions which are mysterious or awe-inspiring, irreducible to rational explanations and linked to the supernatural or appealing to the aesthetic sensibility, see Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, translated by John W. Harvey, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1923.

development of a distinct society surrounded by English Protestant North America. Maybe it is something more immanent in the ways the buildings themselves contrast with the profane quotidian in a universal manner across Quebec's territory, latently cultivating a shared worldview and cosmology? Their unworldly qualities transcend temporal time and space. McLuhan might argue that they have and do function as a binding technology in the way they symbolically and materially mark French-Canadians' cultural and physical space⁵. Maybe the allure has something to do with their stoic defiance of a world in which change is the order of the day. For others their sense is primarily social, churches might recall acts of charity or compassion, and yet others may use them as repositories for personal memories and family traditions. Often churches can be all these things at once, even for people who do not approve of the Church as an institution. As healthy and stable parishes rarify, it is, of course, tempting to romanticise the evanescent, in much the same way we do pristine wildernesses or species threatened with extinction. But these were merely the reasons which drew me to the subject of church closure and not the focus of my research.

The objective of this research is to understand what is happening to something I care about, in much the same way as many scholars devote themselves to resolving a problem which personally affects them and that nothing can be done to change other than to appreciate its fullness. So, I admit, I do not like to see churches close, but when they must, church closures, especially when they are national in scope, present captivating social subjects of social reconfiguration.

1. Outsider Impressions: Quebec's Church Closure Particularity

It is generally admitted that people do not like to discuss politics, religion, or money, so any conversation about the future of Quebec's Catholic churches has proven to be as taboo as they

⁵ See Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: Extensions of Man*, New York, McGraw-Hill, 1964.

have become inevitable⁶. Beyond the universal aversion to discuss divisive topics, Quebecers' profoundly complicated ambivalence towards their religious history meant that after the initial effervescence following Vatican II reforms, Quebec's religious situation and what it meant for its churches were relegated as much as possible to people's private meditation. Put another way, collectively, people seemed to have adjusted to not thinking about or actively participating in their churches, meanwhile taking them for granted as important components of society⁷. For fifty years, most of Quebec's churches have survived this magical thinking, but by now, every diocese and most parishes, nearly all comprised of fused church communities⁸, have been forced to have frank and long-pent-up conversations about their priorities for the future and their obligations to the past – subjects which are frequently at odds. These conversations, which sometimes become bitter and protracted conflicts, are nourished by competing worldviews, religious practices and sensibilities, as well as financial and political priorities. As a result of the speed and density of the phenomenon, closures have catalysed a nationwide reconsideration of Quebec's Catholic Church and revealed multiple stakeholders across the religious, civil society, and political domains who together have been forced to negotiate, however briefly or at length, the dismantlement of their small piece of what was once an omnipresent national institution. For many, their Catholic heritage continues to impregnate the national imagination in a myriad of ways⁹. Some are positive, notably gratitude for Church stewardship of religion, the arts, history, politics or community. Others are

⁶ See E.-Martin Meunier, « L'appartenance catholique des Québécois et son double », in V. Aubourg, D. Meintel, O. Servais (dirs.), *Ethnographie du catholicisme contemporain*, Paris, Karthala. Chapter 10.

⁷ *Idem.*, Ch. 10.

⁸ Formerly autonomous parishes.

⁹ See Jean-François Laniel, « Il était une foi des bâtisseurs: vers une synthèse socio-historique du catholicisme et du nationalisme québécois en modernité (1840-2015) », doctoral dissertation, Université du Québec à Montréal, 2018; also Raymond Lemieux, « Le Catholicisme québécois : une question de culture », *Sociologie et sociétés*, 22(2), 1990, p.145-164.

negative, conjuring oppression, repression, and abuse. Ultimately church closures evoke an ambivalent combination of both types of emotions.

My research sought to populate what are often inanimate stories of church closures, which invariably focus on buildings, by identifying stakeholders and describing their concerns, priorities, and motivations to participate in church closure in three different contexts, and to analyse their activity over the course of the closure process. I took a narrative, ethnographic, and typological approach and the results portray a Church, communities, and a society amid dramatic infra and superstructural transformation. Often the pattern of groups predates closure and represents different types of Catholic mentalities, which were able to co-exist in social invisibility while the future of their church was secure. Studying church closure from a social perspective shows that when the closure conversation can no longer be avoided, social fault lines appear and demarcate a series of interests and worldviews to support divergent programs for the socio-religious reconfiguration of ‘cultural Catholicism’ to the emergent ‘religious heritage’ regime.

Academically, I have focused on the phenomenon of church closures for the past 12 years and during that time the practice has grown and accelerated. Once closure would only affect peripheral parishes, those in emptying rural regions or a community’s second or third church built after 1945 to accommodate the postwar demographic boom. Now, closure regularly strikes at the heart of what once seemed untouchable by practising and non-practising Catholics alike. It was assumed by many of the people I spoke to over the course of my field work that the phenomena would have been settled by authorities before it reached the core of what is considered religious heritage: parishes with elevated religious, architectural, or cultural significance. Now closure threatens cathedrals and basilicas, on the one hand, as well as village churches, which are often communities’ only public spaces. Whenever they occur, church closures force difficult decisions that articulate

multiple visions of what is religious heritage and what it is for. When I first started my inventory of Quebec's closed Catholic churches in 2017, including chapels, I had counted some 400 Catholic closures. Seven years later, the figure is closer to 650. The Religious Heritage Council reports that 800 churches (all denominations included) have been closed, transformed, and/or demolished, a full one third of those inventoried in 2003; moreover, some 100 closed in 2023 alone¹⁰.

It has been fascinating to observe the often-enigmatic social patterns which present themselves in media as, one after another, hundreds of churches have closed their doors and scandalised the public¹¹. Why, one might easily wonder, do Quebeckers react so forcefully to the news of yet another church closure when so few use their churches? Indeed, according to a 2024 Angus Reid Poll, a mere 2 per cent of Quebeckers report attending Mass on a weekly basis, and only 51 per cent say they believe in God, compared to 49 per cent who identify as atheists¹².

What do these reactions reveal about religion's role in the processes of contemporary cultural change? Most of all, one wonders; how do Quebeckers make sense of so many churches closing so suddenly? Just as Twain was struck by the abundance of churches in the nineteenth century, the twenty-first century visitor to Quebec cannot help but marvel at the number of churches that have been abandoned, transformed or disappeared entirely.

The rapidity and pervasiveness of Catholic church closure, compared with the same process outside of Quebec, raise interesting questions about its particularist expression in that society. As

¹⁰ See François Gloutenay, « 800 lieux de cultes 'en mutation' », *Présence : Information religieuse*, February 27, 2024 (web), consulted October 3, 2024, <https://presence-info.ca/article/actualite/patrimoine/800-lieux-de-culte-dits-en-mutation/>.

¹¹ My archives on each of the 650 Catholic churches closures in Québec, show that each closure is closely followed by media.

¹² See Jean-Pierre Proulx, « L'effondrement de l'Église catholique du Québec. Et après ? », *Presence-Info*, April 4, 2024, (web), consulted October 25, 2024, <https://presence-info.ca/article/actualite/religion/leffondrement-de-leglise-catholique-du-Quebec-et-apres/>.

with many scholars interested in Quebec from Anglo-Protestant North America, there is a strong temptation to see Canadian Catholic heartland only in the former French exceptionality. But to do so would be to ignore analogous transformations to the religious landscapes in virtually all Western European societies, which like Quebec have undergone dramatic changes to rates of religious practice and likewise face questions of how to manage the buildings where it takes place. Although it may surprise some readers, the best way to compare international models of religious heritage management is to examine the structural relationships between Church and State, what the French call *laïcité*, and what we in English refer to as the separation between Church and State, or more recently as secularism.

2. *International Secularism Regimes: A Determining Factor of Closure*

Beyond the foundational principle of a separation of powers shared by virtually all Western European countries, Quebec theologian and anthropologist, Solange Lefebvre, takes a closer look at secularism, classifying its national modalities by constitutional regimes¹³. She arranges them into four types: 1), established religions: England, Scotland, Sweden and Greece; 2), recognised status: Germany, Switzerland, Spain, Portugal, Italy; 3), the pillars system: Belgium, Luxembourg and the Netherlands; and 4), republican separation: France and the United States of America. Based on history and constitutional arrangements, Lefebvre situates Quebec and Canada more broadly within the second type of regime because articles in the constitution specifically designated powers to the Protestant and Catholic Churches in the domain of education.¹⁴ Yet, while constitutional powers and systems of financing public religions often coincide, Lefebvre outlines possible

¹³ See Solange Lefebvre, « La religion dans la sphère publique : sécularité ou laïcité? », in E.-Martin Meunier (dir.), *Le Québec et ses mutations culturelles : Six enjeux pour le devenir d'une société*, Ottawa, Les Presses de l'Université d'Ottawa, 2016, p. 484-488.

¹⁴ Québec amended section 93 of the Constitution Act (formerly British North America Act) in 1997 to de-confessionalise schools and re-organised them according to language.

variations. For example, if in its constitution France declares itself to be secular, it nevertheless provides substantial funding for places of worship... Although England has an established Church and monarchy, with [the King] as head of the Church of England, it does not fund any of the country's places of worship¹⁵.

English sociologist of religions, Grace Davie, offers an alternative classification of secularism organised around Church-funding models, which complements Lefebvre's constitutional survey¹⁶. Grouping European countries by the way they support their churches helps to explain why there is considerable variety in the numbers of church closures, despite widespread (but not total) religious homogenisation¹⁷ in terms of beliefs and practices. Some national churches, like Germany's Catholic and Protestant Churches, are quite wealthy. In 1997, Davie notes that the German government distributed some 15.4 billion Deutsche Marks¹⁸, raised by an optional 8–9 per cent income tax, largely to its Lutheran and Catholic churches¹⁹. But like other churches since the 1990s, German Churches have faced a steady decline in revenues driven by members legally leaving the church to avoid paying the voluntary but automatic tax. The German Council of Catholic Bishops reported a 5 per cent decline in revenue between 2022 and 2023, totalling 6.51 billion euros, down by 330 million euros from the previous year²⁰. Between 2019 and 2023, 1,779,014 Germans officially left the Church, leaving 20.4 million registered Catholics in the

¹⁵ See Solange Lefebvre, 2016, *Op. Cit.*, p.487.

¹⁶ See Grace Davie, *Religion in modern Europe: a memory mutates*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2000.

¹⁷ See Jean-Paul Willaime, *Europe et religions: les enjeux du XXI^e siècle*, Paris, Fayard, 2001, p. 41-42.

¹⁸ €14,155,755,770.68 in 2025 adjusted to inflation and currency exchange.

¹⁹ See Grace Davie, 2000, *Op. Cit.*, p. 41.

²⁰ “German Catholic Church Faces Significant Drop in Church Tax Revenue for 2023”, *Zenit*, July 11, 2024, (web), consulted October 4, 2024, <https://zenit.org/2024/07/11/german-catholic-church-faces-significant-drop-in-church-tax-revenue-for-2023/>.

country of 84.7 million²¹. Opting out, however, means ineligibility for sacraments like baptism and funeral rites, barring those willing to belong but ill-disposed to contribute to the Church. Even with the generous State subsidies, 650 Catholic churches have been closed in Germany since 2005²².

Lutheran Churches in Denmark and Sweden have also experienced what they call ‘contracting out’, but to a lesser degree than in Germany despite even lower rates of religious practice. Denmark, Sweden and Norway all have church taxes. In Denmark, for example, 72.1 per cent of the population belonged to the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Denmark in 2023²³, down from 88 per cent in 2000²⁴. Between 2010 and 2024, 225,000 Danes left the Church out of total Church population of 4,479,214 in 2010²⁵. The ‘People’s Church’, as they call it, maintains 2,123 church buildings, which are renowned for the immaculate care they receive. Both Denmark and Sweden have changed their laws to give equal recognition to all religious denominations, including notably their newly arrived Muslim populations. During this time rates of baptism fell from 77.2 per cent of newborns down to 58.7 in 2018, though for decades just over 2 per cent of members attended church regularly²⁶. Church closures are still rare in Denmark, but the phenomenon is taking hold. While only nine churches closed between 1849 and 2012, the Church deemed that 1,144 parishes

²¹ See Luke Coppen and Brendan Hodge, “More than 400,000 Catholics left Church in Germany in 2023”, *The Pillar*, June 27, 2024, (web), consulted October 4, 2024, <https://catholiccitizens.org/news/107389/more-than-400000-catholics-left-church-in-germany-in-2023/>.

²² See Christopher Strack, “Germany: Catholic churches are demolished or repurposed”, *Deutsch Welle*, February 19, 2024, (web), consulted October 4, 2025, <https://www.dw.com/en/germany-catholic-churches-are-demolished-or-repurposed/a-68300577>.

²³ See Statistics Denmark (Danmarks Statistik), 2023, *Op. Cit.* Members of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Denmark ([Medlemmer af folkekirken](https://www.dst.dk/da/Statistik/emner/borgere/folkekirke/medlemmer-af-folkekirken)), 2023, (web), accessed October 4, 2024, <https://www.dst.dk/da/Statistik/emner/borgere/folkekirke/medlemmer-af-folkekirken>.

²⁴ See Grace Davie, 2000, *Op. Cit.*, p. 39.

²⁵ See Statistics Denmark (Danmarks Statistik), 2023, *Op. Cit.*

²⁶ See “Nordic churches explore ‘baptism in times of change’”, *Lutheran World*, May 5, 2021, (web), consulted October 4, 2024, <https://lutheranworld.org/news/nordic-churches-explore-baptism-times-change#:~:text=As%20an%20example%2C%20in%20Denmark,Evangelical%20Lutheran%20Church%20in%20Denmark.>

were unviable out of a total of 2,201²⁷. To date, there have been few reports of closures, except for five in 2013, all in Copenhagen²⁸.

Other countries that use a church-tax system are Italy, which reformed its system in the 1980s, and Spain, which copied it, who operate on an assignation basis, meaning they can choose the denomination but not whether to pay. This means these countries, which are almost exclusively Catholic, do risk church closures any time soon.²⁹ In Greece, the Orthodox Church is almost exclusively funded by the state from general revenues.³⁰

France has very little experience of closure. Davie notes that national funding for Churches ceased with the 1905 Law of Separation. After that, churches were dependent either on private sources of funding or upon their owners', municipal governments, goodwill. The State owns most of the major cathedrals, but Emmanuel Macron launched a national collection in 2023 to raise 200 million euros through the Heritage Foundation for the country's local churches, 3,000 of which are considered to be at risk³¹. On the operations side, Lefebvre explains, the State maintains 'collaborations' with the Churches³². These collaborations are very lucrative and stable, such as the provision of day care licenses, prison and hospital chaplaincies and considerable tax deductions on religious work.³³ In terms of how the French use their churches, they are very similar to the

²⁷ "Church analysts: twice as many churches as necessary", *The Copenhagen Post*, February 28, 2012, (web), consulted October 4, 2024, <https://cphpost.dk/2012-02-28/general/church-analysts-twice-as-many-churches-as-necessary/>.

²⁸ See Philip Tees, "Blågårds Kirke in Nørrebro sold to become a concert venue", *The Copenhagen Post*, May 1, 2015, (web), consulted October 4, 2024, <https://cphpost.dk/2015-05-01/news/business/blagards-kirke-in-norrebro-sold-to-become-a-concert-venue/>.

²⁹ See Grace Davie, 2000, *Op. Cit.*, p. 41.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ « Emmanuel Macron annonce une 'collecte pour le patrimoine religieux', notamment pour les églises anciennes », *Le Monde*, September 15, 2023, (web), consulted October 3, 2024, https://www.lemonde.fr/culture/article/2023/09/15/emmanuel-macron-annonce-une-collecte-pour-le-patrimoine-religieux-notamment-pour-les-eglises-anciennes_6189541_3246.html.

³² See Solange Lefebvre, 2016, *Op. Cit.*, p. 488.

³³ See Grace Davie, 2000, *Op. Cit.*, p. 42.

Germans and Scandinavians, hovering just below 5 per cent weekly participation, despite their serious ideological differences developed over the course of the war of the two Frances³⁴. French sociologist of religions Danièle Hervieu-Léger explains the paradoxical stability of the French Catholic Church despite its history and the often-bitter tone of French secularist discourse, writing that even though there is massive evidence of individual and collective detachment from the Church, mentalities remain (or at least have remained for a long time) shaped by the cultural matrix formed for centuries by the dominant religion³⁵. Nevertheless, the French Church hierarchy has warned that the future is uncertain for 3,000 of its 15,000 historic churches out of an estimated total of 42,000 churches and chapels belonging to 12,054 parishes³⁶.

The Benelux countries, on the other hand, characterised by greater religious pluralism than in France, use the pillar system. It is composed not only of churches, but also a full suite of cultural institutions such as schools, universities, unions, scouting organisations, broadcasting systems, leisure groups and healthcare for Catholics, Protestants, Socialists, and Liberals³⁷. In Belgium the government pays the clergy's salaries. Despite this, the bishop of Mechelen-Brussels, citing a low attendance rate of only 1.5 per cent, proposed in 2013 to close 108 of the diocese's 645 churches³⁸. Faced with resistance, these closures did not take place. In 2015, the archbishop of Luxembourg consented to abolish religious education in public schools and to the complete separation of Church

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ See Danièle Hervieu-Léger, « La démocratie providentielle, temps de l'ultra-modernité », *Revue européenne des sciences sociales*, XLIV-135, août 2006, p. 115, <https://journals.openedition.org/ress/261>.

³⁶ See Jonathan Luxmoore, "Europe's church creatively re-thinks as numbers plummet", *National Catholic Reporter*, November 15, 2017, (web) consulted, January 13, 2019, <https://www.ncronline.org/news/world/europes-church-creatively-rethinks-numbers-plummet>, see also « Nombre de paroisses catholique en France », La Conférence des Évêques de France, (web), consulted 13 January 2019, <https://eglise.catholique.fr/guide-eglise-catholique-france/statistiques-de-leglise-catholique-france-monde/statistiques-de-leglise-catholique-france/454033-454033/>.

³⁷ See Grace Davie, 2000, *Op. Cit.*, p. 41.

³⁸ See Jonathan Luxmoore, "With decline in participation, Brussels archdiocese to close churches", *National Catholic Reporter*, February 8, 2013, (web), consulted January 13, 2019, <https://www.ncronline.org/news/world/decline-participation-brussels-archdiocese-close-churches>.

and State to be phased in over two decades³⁹. At the same time, the diocese underwent a major reorganisation, which reduced the number of Catholic parishes from 274 to 33⁴⁰.

Though a similar pillar system exists in the Protestant-majority Netherlands, the government there does not pay the salaries of its clergy⁴¹ and there have been massive amounts of church closures. The Netherlands, in fact, was the first country to close their churches *en masse*. Indeed, between 1993 and 2003, the Netherlands had already closed 623 churches⁴². The Netherlands Bishops' Conference plans to have closed two thirds or 1,000 of the Nation's Catholic churches by 2025⁴³. During the pandemic, the number of practising Catholics declined by 36 per cent and now represents only 2.7 per cent of the country's baptised Catholics⁴⁴. Heritage and urbanism scholars credit the scale of these closures to the Netherlands' extreme density and low religious practice⁴⁵. As a result of their pioneering experience, these disciplines in the Netherlands established a 'heritage'-based model of church closures, which has been adopted by international counterparts, like the United Kingdom and Québec⁴⁶.

England, particularly, and the United Kingdom more generally, is structurally like Québec. It has an established Church with historical dominance and a religiously pluralising population. But despite close constitutional ties, as Davie points out, financial support is limited – although the

³⁹ See Jonathan Luxmoore, *Op. Cit.*, November 15, 2017.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ See Grace Davie, 2000, *Op. Cit.* p. 41.

⁴² See Kirsten Velthuis & Dirk H. R. Spennemann, "The Future of Defunct Religious Buildings: Dutch Approaches to Their Adaptive Re-use", *Cultural Trends*, 16(1), 2007, p.43-66.

⁴³ See "1,000 Catholic churches to close in Holland by 2025", *The Tablet*, December 4, 2013, (web), consulted January 13, 2019, <https://www.thetablet.co.uk/news/170/1-000-catholic-churches-in-holland-to-close-by-2025>.

⁴⁴ See Solène Tadié, "The 'Pastoral Council' and the Collapse of the Catholic Faith in the Netherlands", *The Catholic Register*, February 1, 2023, (web), consulted October 3, 2024, <https://www.ncregister.com/news/the-pastoral-council-and-the-collapse-of-the-catholic-faith-in-the-netherlands>.

⁴⁵ See Kirsten Velthuis & Dirk H. R. Spennemann, *Op. Cit.*, p. 44.

⁴⁶ See Jurgen Van't Hof, "Herbestemmen: maatschappelijk of monumentaal probleem?", *Jaarboek Monumentenzorg*, 1999, p. 17–26; and Laurier Turgeon (dir.), *Le patrimoine religieux du Québec: entre le cultuel et le culturel*, Quebec City, Les Presses de l'Université Laval, 2005.

State does provide a generous pension system for clergy⁴⁷. Like Québec, through its *Conseil du patrimoine religieux*⁴⁸, the government provides infrastructure grants through its ‘Roof Repair’ fund (£15 million in 2014) as well as some £440 million in lottery funds distributed by the National Heritage Memorial Fund per year (2016–2017)⁴⁹. Despite this, the various Protestant Churches in the United Kingdom have plans to sell 9,560 churches of their 48,500 churches by 2030⁵⁰. In the last ten years, 3,500 have already been sold and the Church of Scotland plans to depart with 40 per cent of their existing parishes.⁵¹ With respect to the Church of England’s 16,000 churches, 324 closed by 2013 and another 887 were on a ‘critical list’, meaning the congruence of building decay and a dwindling congregation⁵². That being said, the institution reports that it has only actually closed between 20 and 25 a year since then and that the buildings are governed by a Church decree that has the force of an Act of Parliament to find new public uses for them⁵³.

In Anglophone North America, the situation is hardly different among mainline Churches. Even in the notoriously religious United States, where one in five people is Catholic, congregations have faced massive waves of closures. Between 1990, when the number of Catholic parishes reached

⁴⁷ See Grace Davie, 2000, *Op. Cit.*, p. 41.

⁴⁸ Created as a State foundation in 1995 to steward Québec’s religious heritage.

⁴⁹ See ERS Research and Consultancy, “National Heritage Memorial Fund: Listed Places of Worship Roof Repair Fund Evaluation – Final Report”, National Heritage Memorial Fund, April 2017, (web), consulted 13 January 2019, p.8, http://www.nhmf.org.uk/sites/default/files/RRF%20Project%20Evaluation%20Final%20Report%20May%202017_0.pdf.

⁵⁰ See Vikki Miller & Jonathon Wynne-Jones, “Church of England Church closures accelerate”, *The Telegraph*, July 26, 2008, (web), consulted 13 January 2019, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/religion/2461839/Church-of-England-church-closures-accelerate.html>.

⁵¹ See, “Closing churches cuts worship numbers, new opinion poll finds”, *National Church Trust*, August 21, 2024, (web), consulted October 3, 2024, <https://www.nationalchurchestrust.org/news/closing-churches-cuts-worship-numbers-new-opinion-poll-finds#:~:text=Over%203%2C500%20churches%20have%20closed,as%2040%25%20of%20its%20churches>.

⁵² See Simon Jenkins, “England’s churches can survive – but the religion will have to go”, *The Guardian*, October 22, 2015, (web), consulted 13 January 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/oct/22/churches-survive-church-of-england-religion-buildings>.

⁵³ See “Closed Churches”, The Church of England, 2024, (web), consulted October 3, 2024, <https://www.churchofengland.org/resources/parish-reorganisation-and-church-property/closed-churches#:~:text=A%20small%20number%20of%20churches,new%20uses%20for%20these%20buildings>.

its zenith of 19,620, and 2020, 9 per cent of parishes have closed across the United States⁵⁴. Fortunes have changed for American Protestants as well. Between 2014 and 2019, more churches closed than were opened for the first time. In 2014, 4,000 new Protestant churches were opened compared to 3,700 closed. In 2019, those figures reversed to 3,000 new churches against 4,500 closures and between 2007 and 2021 the percentage of Americans reporting Christian affiliation has declined from 78 to 63 per cent⁵⁵.

Considerable parish fusions and closures have begun to occur in English Canada⁵⁶ as well, especially in the Maritime provinces⁵⁷. The Catholic Church benefits from separate school systems in Alberta, Newfoundland and Labrador, Ontario, Québec, Saskatchewan, the Northwest Territories, and the Yukon⁵⁸. It was not until the 1990s that public schools in most of the province ceased offering Protestant religious education and prayer in the classroom following a Charter

⁵⁴ See Aleja Hertzler-McCain, “Catholic parishes disproportionately closed in poor, Black and Latino neighborhoods”, *Religion News*, April 5, 2024, (web), consulted, October 25, 2024, <https://religionnews.com/2024/04/05/catholic-parishes-disproportionately-closed-in-poor-black-and-latino-neighborhoods/>, and Mark M. Gray, Mary L. Gautier, & Melissa A. Cidade. “The changing face of US Catholic parishes. A Report produced for the Emerging Models of Pastoral Leadership Project”, National Association for Lay Ministry, 2011, p. 6, (web), consulted 13 January 2019, <https://nalm.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/Changing-Face-of-US-Catholic-Parishes.pdf>.

⁵⁵ See Scott Neuman, “The faithful see both crisis and opportunity as churches close across the country”, May 17, 2023, (web), consulted October 4, 2024, <https://www.npr.org/2023/05/17/1175452002/church-closings-religious-affiliation>.

⁵⁶ The first wave of Ontario Church closures took place in the diocese of London in 2006 when 36 churches were closed, see “Catholic diocese closing 36 churches in Ontario”, *The Globe and Mail*, May 1, 2006, (web), consulted 13 January 2019, <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/national/catholic-diocese-closing-36-churches-in-ontario/article4108777/>.

⁵⁷ One hypothesis is that the difference between religious practice in the Maritimes and the Rest of English Canada takes into account different demographic situations. In the Maritimes negligible immigration has meant that ageing congregations have not benefited from the more practising immigrants from the Global South as they have in urban centres in Ontario where fewer Catholic churches have closed their doors so far. In terms of what Church-State relations looks like in English Canada, it varies from province to province. For journalistic details on Maritime church closures see Todd Battis, “Attendance woes forcing churches to close in Eastern Canada”, *CTV News*, May 7, 2017, (web), consulted January 13, 2019, <https://www.ctvnews.ca/canada/attendance-woes-forcing-churches-to-close-in-eastern-canada-1.3402663>.

⁵⁸ Solange Lefebvre (dir.), *La religion dans la sphère publique*, Montreal, Presses de l’Université de Montréal, 2005.

challenge in Ontario⁵⁹. The United Church of Canada in particular, which is Canada's largest Protestant denomination, has shuttered one church a week since 2005, an impressive figure given the scant press coverage⁶⁰. The Anglican Church, meanwhile, reportedly loses 13,000 members per year and closes its churches at a rate comparable to the United Church of Canada⁶¹. In fact, according to a 2018 study, the Anglican Church of Canada anticipates totally exhausting its membership by 2040⁶². Considering all denominations together, The National Trust of Canada estimated in 2019 that, across the country, more than 9,000 of the country's 27,000 places of worship would close by 2030⁶³.

From an English-speaking Catholic perspective, while the closures in Boston generated considerable resistance, it was short-lived⁶⁴. In English Canada there is no meaningful difference between how Catholic church closures are reported compared to their Protestant counterparts. Quebec is singular in the North American context in the way in which church closures have sustained the Nation's attention for two decades. This might have something to do with its unique ethnolinguistic religious dynamic as the only Western society where its minority religious and linguistic status perfectly coincide as a majority in a semi-autonomous State within another State

⁵⁹ See Solange Lefebvre, *et al.*, "Changes in religious education in response to growing diversity: a comparison of Brazil, Canada and England." *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 46(5), 2025, p.1-21; Solange Lefebvre, « La religion dans la sphère publique : sécularité ou laïcité? », in E.-Martin Meunier (dir.), *Le Québec et ses mutations culturelles : Six enjeux pour le devenir d'une société*, Ottawa, Les Presses de l'Université d'Ottawa, 2016, p. 484-488; and Solange Lefebvre (dir.), *La religion dans la sphère publique*, Montreal, Presses de l'Université de Montréal, 2005; and Greg M. Dickinson & W. Rod Dolmage, "Education, religion, and the courts in Ontario", *Canadian Journal of Education/Revue canadienne de l'éducation*, 21(4), 1996, p. 363-383.

⁶⁰ See Chantal Braganza, "Why the province's churches are up for sale", *TVO*, September 8, 2015 (web), consulted January 13, 2019, <https://www.tvo.org/article/current-affairs/why-the-provinces-churches-are-up-for-sale>.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² See Tali Folkin, "Gone by 2040?: Statistics report a 'wake-up call' to church, says primate", *Anglican Journal of Canada*, 146(1), 2020, p. 6-8.

⁶³ See Bonnie Allen, "From sacred to secular: Canada set to lose 9,000 churches, warns national heritage group", *CBC*, March 10, 2019, (web), consulted October 4, 2024, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/losing-churches-canada-1.5046812>.

⁶⁴ See John C. Seitz, *No Closure: Catholic Practice and Boston's Parish Shutdowns*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 2011.

dominated by a different religion and language dominate⁶⁵. Notably, Quebec is the only jurisdiction in North America where churches – Catholic – have a specific civil status, outlined in 1965 by the Parish Law⁶⁶. The law details parish governance structures and property rights, which are held in trust by six churchwardens elected by parishioners, which distinguishes it from the rest of North America, where Catholic churches are the property of diocesan corporations. This means that considerable power over churches flows upwards from parishioners rather than downwards from Bishops and their chancelleries.

3. *Quebec's Church-State Arrangement: A unique civil status.*

To better appreciate Quebec's experience of secularism, which is influenced by both France and Great Britain, Lefebvre emphasises the importance of activities such as the management of religious heritage, the dates of national holidays, religious tourism and the arts – all areas where the Quebec State and religion overlap in active collaborations⁶⁷. She argues that Quebec initially took an approach more like Great Britain, which is “more empathetic and open to the religious fact in its specific reality”, compared to in France, where secularism, which “drags with it an ideology of emancipation from religion”⁶⁸. This meant that, after the Liberal government of Jean Lesage passed Bill-60 in 1964, the Church hierarchy amicably relinquished to the newly interventionist State most of its powers and institutions of education and welfare. In the matter of schools, separate confessional religious systems were maintained, and the Catholic clergy retained its prerogative over religious curricula in an arrangement Quebecer sociologists of religions E.-Martin Meunier

⁶⁵ While there are historical exceptions such as Poland during its Soviet occupation, that configuration pre-dates the church closure phenomenon.

⁶⁶ See Quebec National Assembly, *Loi sur les Fabriques*, first session, 1965.

⁶⁷ See Lefebvre, 2016 *Op. Cit.*, p. 489-490.

⁶⁸ *Idem.*, p. 493, original : « *plus empathique et ouverte au fait religieux dans sa consistance propre ... qu'en France, qui traîne avec elle une idéologie émancipatrice du religieux* ».

and Jean-François Laniel describe as an ‘Implicit Concordat’⁶⁹. The arrangement remained remarkably stable for almost 40 years of rapid decline of religious practice until schools secularised in 2001⁷⁰ and ceased teaching primarily Catholic religious education in 2008⁷¹. During that same period, however, the State, as will be discussed below, expanded its role in the maintenance of religious heritage. The complicated relationship between Quebec’s Church and State is not simply legal, though. Its transformations and Quebecers’ understandings of it are produced by a cultural dialectic, which together form a symbolically charged national reference. In other words, secularist movements do not appear in a vacuum. Rather, they are the products of national experiences of religion and interpretations of those experiences, as well as subsequent reinterpretations⁷².

B. The Church and the French-Canadian National Reference

Decades after he played a first-hand role in documenting and analysing Quebec’s socio-religious transformations of the 1970s⁷³, in 1993 Fernand Dumont elaborated his theory of how a nation produces its references in his book *Genèse de la société québécoise*. Dumont describes the national reference as comprised of three types of intellectual production, which all trace their

⁶⁹ See E.-Martin Meunier & Jean-François Laniel and Jean-Christophe Demers. « Permanence et recomposition de la « religion culturelle ». Aperçu socio-historique du catholicisme québécois (1970-2006) », in Robert Mager & Serge Cantin (dirs.), *Modernité et religion au Québec. Où en sommes-nous*, Quebec City, Les Presses de l’Université Laval, 2010, p. 79-128, original : « un concordat implicite »; as well as Jacques Palard, *Dieu a changé au Québec: Regards sur un catholicisme à l’épreuve du politique*, Quebec City, Les Presses de l’Université Laval, 2010, p. 15.

⁷⁰ When schools stopped providing Catholic pastoral care and adopted a new program called Spiritual Guidance and Community Engagement, See Élisabeth Garant, « L’école face au défi de la laïcité », *Relations*, March 2003, (web), consulted January 10, 2025, <https://cjf.qc.ca/revue-relations/publication/article/lecole-face-au-defi-de-la-lacite/?srsId=AfmBOopOFZpZqVZkgAgOMs8VAY6Js097whG8q0eJz9MTLsbG4EQ9wj2h>.

⁷¹ The controversial new program called “Ethics and Religious Culture” emphasised teaching world religions on an equal footing, although many criticized the program for continuing to emphasise Catholicism for nationalistic reasons.

⁷² See Fernand Dumont, *Genèse de la société québécoise*, Montreal, Boréal, 1993.

⁷³ See Fernand Dumont, *L’Église du Québec, un héritage, un projet*. Rapport-synthèse, instruments de travail, Montreal, Fides, 1971, 6 tomes.

origins to myth: ideology, historiography, and literature, which are diffused to the wider public to produce tangible narratives and images to reflect national identity and values. Through an ongoing process of meaning making, national feeling emerges and undergoes a constant exercise of edification in response to History. He argues that referential edification is necessary to give form to the ‘indefinite spaces’ of religion, civil society, and politics⁷⁴. Recalling a moment of insight, Dumont describes overhearing a woman at a diner describing her day at the factory, which led him to understand that without her leisure time, her work world would have no meaning and that self-conscious and widely accepted leitmotifs are necessary to communicate abstract associations effectively⁷⁵. He realised the same is true for the Nation. We are one thing because we are not another; however, what we are is always subject to challenge and transformation, while the core of what we are describing remains the same. Just because the details of what the woman uses to describe being at work change does not mean that she is no longer trying to share the fact she spent the day engaged in wage labour.

Dumont proposes that the process of edification is a dialectic. When the symbols used to describe reality are invalidated by change, critique emerges and duplication or *dédoublement* as he describes it, occurs. Different interpretations of the same reality compete to replace the previous reference of the social fact, in this case the Nation. Through their critique of previous references, the old symbol is reabsorbed into the renovated and transformed reference and synthesis is achieved, accommodating the need for continuity and a change, thus maintaining the credibility and salience of a reference; ‘by virtue of their opposition, there is a circulation of meaning, a reciprocal interpretation’⁷⁶. So, even if the significance of Quebec’s religious heritage may evolve,

⁷⁴ See Fernand Dumont, *Genèse de la société québécoise*, Montreal, Boréal, 1993, p. 346-348.

⁷⁵ *Idem.*, p. 350.

⁷⁶ *Idem.* P. 346.

religion nevertheless survives as an important vector of the national identity, as *laïcité* for example.

Allow me to provide a more pertinent example. Since the mid-19th century, Saint-Jean-Baptiste has become universally accepted as one of the most important national symbols of French-Canada. This acceptance made the figure a national reference replete with a full suite of allegorical meanings suited for the period's national messianism. As the religious foundations of the Nation were critiqued and challenged throughout the secularising decade of the 1960s, the figure's referential capacity no longer enjoyed the same popular consensus. Sociologist Geneviève Zubrzycki highlights an episode during the 1969 Saint-Jean-Baptiste parade where students beheaded the saint's effigy on one of the floats. She interprets that action as a type of iconoclasm, which she calls an 'iconoclash', which she describes as a literal performance of the renegotiation of a national symbol and provoking a national reconsideration of religion's place in Quebec's public life⁷⁷. Thus, a moment of duplication can be seen as a moment of challenging the accepted meaning of what Pierre Bourdieu would call a 'consecration'⁷⁸. Tellingly, Bourdieu conceptualises cultural consecration as passing from religion to the State and this is exactly what happened to the figure of Saint-Jean-Baptiste, a reference that, despite secularisation, continues to exercise a powerful role to this day as the namesake of Quebec's national holiday, now more associated with outdoor concerts and fireworks than piety. This displacement is analogous to English-Canada's transformation of the Victoria Day holiday sense, which is no longer explicitly a celebration of monarchy. Through these renovations, the original meaning moves from explicit to implicit but

⁷⁷ See Geneviève Zubrzycki, *Beheading the Saint: Nationalism, Religion, and Secularism in Québec*, Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 2016.

⁷⁸ See Pierre Bourdieu, « Genèse et structure du champ religieux ». *Revue française de Sociologie*, 12, 1971, p. 295–334.

remains nationally significant as memory.

In the same way, despite radical transformations of the Church's social role in Quebec, churches continue to function as important social referents, which are symbolically charged and recharged with an entire discursive genealogy through which successive polarisations reactivate Québec's pre-1960, or French-Canadian, mythology. In other words, even if people no longer attend church, churches dialectically maintain their referential power as carriers of social meaning and memory, at once symbolic and material, at least in Quebec.

Herein lies the social significance of Dumont's method: it is culture which forms public opinion, and which leads to political action, which can produce social transformation – essentially, public opinion and political action are not produced out of a void, but rather a reservoir of culture. His method therefore allows us to scientifically trace the impact of ideas directed at imagined social spaces, which, in turn, have very real impacts on people's lived experiences by producing ever-changing worldviews called on to understand the Nation.

By examining historiographical dialectics of Quebec's representations of religion's national role, we can better understand the elements with which individuals can produce social meaning out of church closures. In that spirit, a brief review of Quebec's modern historiography of religion will be presented to provide readers with some insights into the elements which can diversely form French-speaking Quebecers' religious worldviews.

1. Modernist Duplication, Strict vs. Open Secularism: 1960–1980

If it is too strong to describe the modernist configuration as contemptuous of tradition, it is fair to say it was marked by a strong opposition to the Catholic hierarchy's guiding ideology oriented

around the three pillars: of agriculturalism, anti-statism and messianism⁷⁹. During the 1950s, liberal reformers found themselves allied in their calls for change with Personalists⁸⁰ like Pierre Vadenboncoeur, Fernand Dumont, and Jacques Grand'Maison in their demands to embrace modernity and end what they saw as a sterile, conformist and stagnant society. The review *Cité Libre* emerged as a centre of social, religious, political, and economic critique,⁸¹ which emphasised religion's potential positive role in future national configurations. E.-Martin Meunier and Jean-Philippe Warren cite Guy Cormier's program for *Cité Libre* which affirmed that:

We want a Christian Quebec... but a Christian one from within – which is much more difficult – and not a politico-religious State that restricts consciences and caricatures itself, in the eyes of its neighbours and its own children – a Catholicism that transcends history and political regimes⁸².

Liberals and personalists supported one another's calls for change until the death of authoritarian premier Maurice Duplessis and the election of Jean Lesage's Liberals in 1960, when their paths would diverge. Secularist liberals would occupy themselves with modernising the State by pursuing a pragmatic nationalism and the more religiously oriented Personalists, like Dumont and Grand'Maison, who remained more focused on developing a distinct ethnic culture, worked to modernise from within the Church and universities⁸³. There were two responses to the need to

⁷⁹ See Michel Brunet, « Trois dominantes de la pensée canadienne-française : l'agriculturisme, l'antiétatisme et le messianisme », dans *La Présence anglaise et les Canadiens*, Montreal, Beauchemin, 1958, p. 112-166.

⁸⁰ A Catholic spiritual and social movement originating in the 1930s dedicated to developing individual potential and religious interiority through social action which some describe as the emergence as the left-wing within the Church.

⁸¹ See E.-Martin Meunier & Jean-Philippe Warren, « La question sociale à la question nationale: la revue Cité Libre (1950-1963) », *Recherches sociographiques*, 39(2-3), 1998, p. 291-316.

⁸² See Guy Cormier, « Petite méditation sur l'existence canadienne-française », *Cité Libre*, 1(1), 1950, p. 25-36, cited in E. Martin Meunier & Jean-Philippe Warren, 1998, *Op. Cit.*, p. 292, original: « Nous voulons d'un Québec chrétien ... mais chrétien par le dedans – ce qui est bien plus difficile – et non d'un État politico-religieux qui brime les consciences et caricature, aux yeux des voisins et de ses propres enfants, un catholicisme qui transcende l'Histoire et les régimes politiques ».

⁸³ Paul-André Turcotte offers an interesting class analysis of the differing formations offered by Québec's classical colleges and the public secondary education provided by the Teaching Brothers. He argues that this dichotomy cultivated different nationalisms. The former, Turcotte argues, produced a cultural nationalism concerned with the

renovate unanimous and involuntary Catholicism as a prime informant of the national reference.

Thus, with the Liberals in power, and the Quiet Revolution installed, the first popular targets for Lesage's discourse of *rattrapage*⁸⁴ were the Nation's schools. It was the question of religious education around which first rallied reformers and gave birth to the French Language Secularist Movement at the University of Montreal on April 8, 1961, with a demonstration of 800 people. The congress supported a non-confessional language-based system informed by progressive secularism aimed at achieving genuine democracy in all institutions. The MLF did not want to repeat the European experience of secularism, but to create a new one, adapted to our human environment and respect pluralism⁸⁵.

Quebecker historian Martin Roy demonstrates in his analysis of the journal *Parti Pris* that the majority of Quebeckers were not ready for this kind of secularism, which was mostly supported by writers and intellectuals – it was not yet a plausible edification. He suggests that the reforms that came out of the Parent Commission (1963–1964), though instigated by the French Language Secularist Movement, could not be brought to term, demonstrating the limits of Quebec's capacity to secularise at the time. For their vision to bear fruit, Roy suggests that 'the clergy would have to [have been] unanimously reactionary and intractable, resistant to any change and to any withdrawal of clerical influence', which was not the case in Quebec, where significant reforms were already being led from within the Church itself⁸⁶.

project of advancing a distinct culture and worldview while the latter, produced a pragmatic nationalism which prioritized technical development aimed at de-proletarianization. See Paul-André Turcotte « Éducation catholique et nationalisme dans l'enseignement secondaire québécois », *Social Compass*, 31(4), 1984, p. 365-377.

⁸⁴ To catch up with or leap forward.

⁸⁵ See Pierre Lebeuf, « Le mouvement laïque : deux ans après », *Liberté*, 5(30), May-June, 1963, p. 181, original : « Une laïcité progressive dont l'objectif était de réaliser une authentique démocratie au niveau de toutes les institutions. Le MLF ne voulait pas refaire l'expérience européenne de la laïcité mais bien en créer une nouvelle, adaptée à notre milieu humain, dans le respect du pluralisme ».

⁸⁶ See Martin Roy, « Le programme laïciste de la revue de gauche Parti pris (1963-1968) », *Bulletin d'histoire politique*, 22(3), 2014, p. 223, original : « il faudrait un clergé unanimement réactionnaire et intraitable, réfractaire à tout changement et à tout repli de l'influence cléricale ».

Once legislators passed Bill-60 in 1964 (the creation of the Ministry of Education), the pitched debate between secularists and the Church cooled off, especially given that the Church itself had embarked on its own exciting program of *aggiornamento*⁸⁷. Historian Gilles Routhier demonstrates that the Second Vatican Council was enthusiastically welcomed by Quebecers who participated by the tens of thousands in pre-conciliar consultation and consciousness-raising activities⁸⁸. Liturgical reforms, such as ending the use of Latin to say Mass, sanctioning some forms of popular religiosity, and relaxing the divisions between clergy and the laity, have been blamed for having destructive consequences on Quebec Catholicism⁸⁹, though it is likely the freefall in religious vocations⁹⁰ and religious practice would have occurred anyway.

As mentioned above, in 1968, sociologist Fernand Dumont presided over a commission tasked with studying the layperson's role in the Church, and to provide the Assembly of Quebec Bishops with recommendations on how the clergy could foster a modern role for the laity. Published in 1972, *'L'Église du Québec, un héritage, un projet'*⁹¹, Dumont's report rejected traditional Catholicism and called on the Quebec Church to abandon its claim over society and instead recommended embracing a critical role through which it could advocate for the poor and oppressed. Dumont infused the document with a kind of Personalist philosophy. Historian Michael Gauvreau notes that Dumont and his colleagues promulgated a refurbished Personalism, linked explicitly to democratic socialism and the quest for an independent Quebec, which, they believed,

⁸⁷ Update.

⁸⁸ See Gilles Routhier, *L'Église Canadienne et Vatican II*, Montreal, Fides, 1997.

⁸⁹ See Michael Gauvreau, *Les origines catholiques de la Révolution tranquille*, Montreal, Fides, 2007.

⁹⁰ Between 1961 and 1981 some 23,000 priests and 17,000 nuns left the clergy. See Lucia Ferretti, *Brève histoire de l'Église catholique au Québec*, Montreal, Boréal, 1999, p. 116, and Paul-André Linteau, René Durocher, Jean-Claude Robert & François Ricard, *Histoire du Québec contemporain*, Tome II : *Le Québec depuis 1930*, Montréal, Boréal, 1989, p. 334 et 653.

⁹¹ See Fernand Dumont, *L'Église du Québec, un héritage, un projet*. Rapport-synthèse, instruments de travail, Montreal, Fides, 1971, 6 tomes.

would challenge Quebecers to embrace a new, and far more dynamic, intersection of religion and public life, a cultural theology that Catholic Liberals hoped would be the spiritual legacy of the Quiet Revolution⁹².

What the report shared with the strict secularists was the desire for a break with the past. Dumont, and Personalists more generally, did not have time for folk traditions, what Claude Ryan deemed ‘effeminate religion’⁹³ or the authoritarianism of much of the existing hierarchy. Gauvreau describes the consequences:

The attempt by the Dumont Commission to summarily purge Quebec Catholicism of any association with its ultramontane past affords what is perhaps the best clue to the real agenda of the Catholic modernists at the end of the 1960s. To counter the momentum towards a religion of quiescence and private security that seemingly offered a respite from clashing political and social ideologies⁹⁴.

In addition to alienating traditional Catholics, Dumont’s vision of cooperation between Church and Nation soon lost key allies in the Parti Québécois. It seemed clear that the Church could no longer play the social role it once enjoyed. Thus, for Catholics motivated by the commission’s calls to open themselves to the future, these signs collectively sent the message, ‘that the Quiet Revolution, having turned the content of Catholic values and their relationship to Quebec upside down, could not be translated into a social or national revolution’⁹⁵. Quebec theologian and sociologist, Gregory Baum argued that ‘[I]n the 1970s the creative critique of the Church began to

⁹² See Gauvreau, Michael, *The Catholic Origins of Quebec’s Quiet Revolution, 1931-1970*, Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2006. P. 349.

⁹³ See Michael Gauvreau, « Diagnostiquer la « schizophrénie spirituelle » du Canada français : la politique spirituelle de Claude Ryan, 1952-1958 », *Revue d’histoire de l’Amérique française*, 67(3-4), hiver-printemps 2014, p. 347.

⁹⁴ See Gauvreau, Michael, *The Catholic Origins of Québec’s Quiet Revolution, 1931-1970*, Montreal & Kingston, McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2006, p. 349.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

become for many an embittered rejection of the Catholic Church'⁹⁶. He interestingly observed a concomitant decline of belief in social democratic values during these same years.

Another theologian-sociologist, Jacques Grand'Maison, likewise observed the discrediting referential effects that triumphant modernist discourse had on attitudes towards religion, suggesting that "the ideal of a modern Quebec opposed to a mediocre past and irrationality has marked our self-image". Continuing, he regretted that, despite the Catholic social movement, which dominated from the 1930s until the early 1960s, secularist views won the day conditioning Quebecers' legitimate "perception of facts, especially in the political sphere, where it leads to the neglect of anything that does not fit in with the current image of a modern society"⁹⁷. Likewise, within the Church, Grand'Maison observed a polarisation leading to referential duplication (two possible responses to the crisis of referential credibility). Describing the post-conciliar response within the Quebec Church, he notes:

[c]ertain people see the current Church as a cumbersome system that cannot be reformed, and so they try to build small autonomous and charismatic communities alongside it, free from dogmatic, moral, religious and clerical overbearing... At the opposite extreme, others are determined to save all the furniture in their father's house, even if it means stripping it of all plaster, varnish, glaze and mould. In this way, some try to maintain contradictory elements: absolute authority and co-responsibility, unconditional obedience and personal responsibility, revolutionary ideas and conservative policies, the primacy of conscience and the primacy of the law, the primacy of the Word of God and the primacy of the magisterium, but all at the price of what mental twists and turns?!⁹⁸

⁹⁶ See Gregory Baum, *Fernand Dumont: A Sociologist Turns to Theology*, Montreal-Kingston, McGill-Queen's Press, 2015, p. 15.

⁹⁷ See Jacques Grand'Maison, *Nationalisme et religion, tome 2 Nationalisme et révolution culturelle*, Montreal, Beauchemin, 1970. p. 189, original: « *L'idéal d'un Québec moderne opposé à un passé médiocre et irrationnel a marqué l'image de soi ... la perception des faits, surtout dans le domaine politique, où il conduit à négliger, tout ce qui cadre mal avec l'image courante d'une société moderne* ».

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, original : « *Certains ne voient dans l'Église actuelle qu'un lourd système irréformable, et, partant, ils tentent de construire à côté des petites communautés autonomes et charismatiques, libres du surplomb dogmatique, moral cultuel et clérical... À l'extrême opposé, d'autres s'acharnent à sauver tout le mobilier, de la maison paternelle, quitte à décaper de tous les enduits, vernis, glaçures ou moisissures. Ainsi, certains tentent de maintenir des éléments contradictoires : l'autorité absolue et la coresponsabilité, l'obéissance inconditionnelle et la responsabilité* ».

As for secular society, Grand'Maison criticised the materiality of what he called a “happy and pacified civilisation”, which he associated with the technocratic project of *rattrapage*.⁹⁹ We see here a clear referential fragmentation producing competing worldviews of Catholicism's signification of and place within Quebec society.

2. *Referential Reformulations: Revisionist Narrative Inversions: 1980-2000*

As Fernand Dumont explains, the same empirical facts can, and perhaps, must be, reinterpreted by subsequent generations via a process of polarisation (or antithesis) and synthesis, which tends towards inversion. Instead of revolutionaries who sought their eschatology through the State or the Church, this time it was political nationalists seeking legitimacy for their independence programs.

The first group, the Normal Society proponents, was inspired by the reinvigorated liberalism of the late 1970s. A new generation of Quebec social thinkers who, recognising Quebec's need for referential coherence for a new age, began producing a universalist historiography that sought to locate the origins of Quebec's modernity along a ‘normal’ historical trajectory by examining indicators such as levels of industrialisation, urbanism and liberalism. These scholars sought to demonstrate that Quebec, contrary even perhaps to its own memory, really had developed, much like every other North American collectivity, beginning to build factories and grow cities in the mid-nineteenth century. Gérard Bouchard describes the project of ‘redefinition’. He argues that Normalist historiography was a ‘necessary and fertile reaction to other historiographical trends that persisted in projecting an extremely distorted and wanting representation of this past, by

personnelle, des idées révolutionnaires et des politiques conservatrices, le primat de la conscience et le primat de la loi, celui de la Parole de Dieu et celui du Magistère, mais tout cela au prix de quelles entourloupes mentales. ».

⁹⁹ *Idem.*, p.195, original : « la civilisation heureuse et pacifiée ».

seeking to ignore Catholicism's referential capacity entirely¹⁰⁰. "Thanks to this reaction, analysis is much richer, hypotheses more varied, and questions infinitely more nuanced"¹⁰¹. Sourcing the lineage of religion's determinative tradition with Quebec's historian Lionel Groulx, Bouchard writes that the French-Canadian historiography, up until the middle of the twentieth century, forged the Nation along ethnic lines that fostered an obsession with collective identity that could easily mutate into intolerance and racism¹⁰². Bouchard argues that revisionist history – or what he calls 'modernist' history – 'eventually showed that Quebec had, in a certain sense, experienced a "normal" evolution, considering the circumstances in which it was shaped'¹⁰³.

But the liberal redrafting of a pre-Quiet Revolution reference did not go unchallenged.

Particularist thinkers rejected the Normalist project as devoid of any empirical adequation in Quebec's historical experience of difference and disagreed with its exclusively political claims for independence based on a normal national progression. Instead, they saw continuity in particularity. This positive particularist perspective was suggested by Raymond Lemieux's presentation of new empirical data, which challenged Quebec's secular meta-narrative. Despite widespread assumptions of dramatic religious decline, his 1990 study of religious indicators in Quebec demonstrated remarkable stability in certain respects. His was the first comprehensive analysis of Quebec's religious indicators since the Quebec Church commissioned Fernand Dumont to study the laity and the Church in 1968¹⁰⁴. Lemieux found that Quebec was not as secular as its Quiet Revolution mythology suggested. His work revealed a majority demand for Catholic rites of

¹⁰⁰ See Gérard Bouchard, *Genèse des nations et cultures du nouveau monde*, Montreal, Boréal, 2000

¹⁰¹ *Idem.*, p. 54.

¹⁰² *Idem.*, p.39.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁴ See Fernand Dumont, *L'Église du Québec, un héritage, un projet*. Rapport-synthèse, instruments de travail, Montréal, Fides, 1971, 6 tomes.

passage (baptism, marriage, funeral) despite a drop in weekly church attendance from 85 per cent in 1965 to 36 per cent in 1990. He also found that in 1990, roughly 90 per cent of parents continued to support Catholic education in schools¹⁰⁵. Lemieux interpreted his results to indicate a religious culture that primarily sought social induction, indifferent to ecclesial norms, and organised through both the public confessional school system, which 90 per cent of Francophone parents wanted to remain Catholic, and the family, which together transmitted beliefs, values and a symbolic reservoir that continued to structure Quebec's cultural imagination with pre-Quiet Revolutionary religious elements¹⁰⁶.

Following Lemieux, a new generation of historians and sociologists came of age: the social thinkers of the New Historical Sensibility¹⁰⁷. They grew up in a society still structured by Catholicism yet lacked memory of the constraints of the Duplessis era, allowing them to reject triumphant modernist historical orthodoxy and reconsider for themselves the Quiet Revolution mythology¹⁰⁸. They include scholars such as Michel Bock, Louise Bienvenue, Éric Bédard, E.-Martin Meunier, Jean-Philippe Perreault, and Jean-Philippe Warren, among others. One of their important themes was to identify sources of modernity that developed within the Church itself, such as Meunier and Warren's work on the personalist movement and the specialised Catholic Action networks¹⁰⁹. In this way, the national reference could recuperate some of the authenticity

¹⁰⁵ See Raymond Lemieux, « Le catholicisme québécois : une question de culture », *Sociologie et sociétés*, 22(2), 1990, p. 160.

¹⁰⁶ Lemieux notes that once given the choice to enroll their children in a Catholic morality course or a secular alternative some 92 per cent in 1986 chose the Catholic option, see Raymond Lemieux, « Le Catholicisme québécois : une question de culture », *Sociologie et sociétés*, 22(2), 1990, p. 160.

¹⁰⁷ See Stéphane Kelly (dir.), *Les idées mènent le Québec : essais sur une sensibilité historique*. Quebec City, Les Presses de l'Université Laval, 2003.

¹⁰⁸ See E.-Martin Meunier, « Une nouvelle sensibilité pour les Enfants du Concile », dans Stéphane Kelly (dir.), *Les idées mènent le Québec. Essais sur une sensibilité historique*, Quebec City, Les Presses de l'Université Laval, 2003, p. 94; and Dominique Foisy-Geoffroy, « Essais sur une sensibilité historique, note critique » *Historical Studies*, 70, 2004, p. 107.

¹⁰⁹ E.-Martin Meunier & Jean-Philippe Warren, *Sortir de la « Grande noirceur ». L'horizon « personnaliste » de la révolution tranquille*, Québec City, Septentrion, 2002.

which Normalist thought has alienated.

This generation renewed Quebec's rich tradition of comprehensive, culturally oriented scholarship initiated by Jean-Charles Falardeau and practised by Dumont and Grand'Maison in contrast with the revisionists' social historical preoccupation with the individual. They also approached history critically like the modernists, but without the same polemic. This tradition recognised Quebec's distinctive religious qualities but compared them to other North American and European societies to situate Quebec's experience in relation to the wider historical forces of social and religious change. The moment was fortuitous for the reconsideration of religion as a pertinent reference via heritage. With the religious turn in 2001, which followed the fall of the World Trade Center towers, the related growing unease toward increasing religious diversity, and questions surrounding the rate and breadth of secularisation, these recent studies rehabilitated the relevance of the Nation's churches as referential objects¹¹⁰.

The point of this historiographical genealogy was to demonstrate the spectrum of widely held views of religion diffuse in Quebec society and how they evolve over time. One only has to view a Quebec film, where religion is almost invariably addressed, to see for themselves how these dialectics infuse popular culture. Given late modernity's fragmentation of worldviews, the above dialectical movements are all possible referential variations that people call on to make sense of

¹¹⁰ See E.-Martin Meunier, Jean-François Laniel & Jean-Christophe Demers, « Permanence et recomposition de la religion culturelle. Aperçu socio-historique du catholicisme québécois (1970-2005) », in Robert Mager & Serge Cantin (dirs.), *Religion et modernité au Québec*, 2010, p. 79-128; E.-Martin Meunier, « L'ancrage du catholicisme au Québec et sa déliaison progressive : une sociologie historique de l'exculturation », in Solange Lefebvre, Céline Béraud et É.-Martin Meunier (dirs.), *Catholicisme et cultures. Regards croisés Québec-France*, Québec City Les Presses de l'Université Laval et Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2015, p. 21-44.

Jean-François Laniel « What 'cultural religion' says about secularization and national identity: a neglected religio-political configuration », *Social Compass*, 63(3), September 2016, p. 372-388; and Solange Lefebvre, 2016, *Op. Cit.*, p. 477-499.

church closure. Churches at once can evoke triumph, oppression, normalcy, and particularity, and for younger Quebecers, perhaps nothing at all as the core of the reference becomes so invisible.

3. *Reconfiguration: The Beginning of the End of Cultural Catholicism*

Though Catholicism managed to maintain a public role during the latter third of the 20th century through an abundance of discretion and subtlety, it was dragged back into public scrutiny at the beginning of the 21st century. Following the passive acceptance of a series of progressive sacrifices of its special status originating from within francophone society, cultural Catholicism's delicately ebbing concordat was disturbed by the arrival of new religions less adapted to Quebec's socio-religious realities, reinvigorating largely dormant calls to finish what the Quiet Revolution had not managed to initially convince Quebecers to do – evacuate religion from public life. If new religions' stridency violated Quebec's tenuous social contract *vis-à-vis* their demands on the public sphere, then the need to regulate them inevitably upsets cultural Catholicism's fragile stability. Once again, Quebec's religious landscape would undergo a process of reconfiguration, which initiated difficult conversations about religion and Quebec culture, which have ironically had far more widespread consequences on Quebec's Catholics than any other group.

Leading up to the new century, in 1981, strict secularist advocates revived the French Language Secularist Movement to demand the de-confessionalisation of the Nation's schools partly to accommodate new arrivals who were neither Catholic nor Protestant, but it would take another two decades before their calls gained popular traction. Successive government commissions, beginning with Proulx Commission (1995–1996) and continued with the Bouchard-Taylor Commission in 2007–2008, were convened to address religion's public role in Quebec society. An overly simplified thesis could argue the strict secularist-oriented Proulx Commission convinced a

freshly defeated post-referendum government to make a national statement by undertaking a constitutional amendment to secularise schools in 1997 and to stop preparing students for sacraments in schools in 2001.

G rard Bouchard and Charles Taylor took a softer approach to religion in 2007–2008, promoting, instead, an ‘open’ secularism aimed at maintaining a positive relationship between religions, notably non-Catholic, and the State. They recommended replacing Catholic and Protestant religious education with a course on ‘Ethics and Religious Cultures’ inaugurated in 2008¹¹¹. At the same time, the government launched an expensive program to inventory and restore churches, developed museums and art exhibitions promoting religious heritage, established extensive networks of religious tourism, and financed the preservation of archives and oral histories of its disappearing religious orders¹¹².

But, despite widespread support for these more typically British open secularist approaches, theologian Solange Lefebvre tells us that the opposite current of strict secularism, or the absolute division of Church and State,¹¹³ was once again, gaining strength and influence¹¹⁴, evidenced by the proposed Charter of Values and the subsequent promulgation of a 2017 law banning wearing

¹¹¹ See Jacques Palard, 2010, *Op. Cit.*

¹¹² Consider for example, the creation of the Foundation for Religious Heritage of Qu bec in 1995, which later became an arm’s length government body which became the Council for Religious Heritage of Qu bec in 2007 and which has received roughly \$400 million since 1995, and \$25 million for the year of 2018-2019, \$13 million more than the previous year, see Fran ois Gloutnay, « Le CAQ consacrait 25 millions \$ au patrimoine religieux », *Presence, information religieuse*, September 17, 2018, (web), consulted January 13, 2019, <http://presence-info.ca/article/politique/la-caq-consacrerait-25-m-au-patrimoine-religieux>. Likewise of interest is religious tourism which is linked to the National Capital Commission in Quebec City and an equivalent organisation in Montr al, as well as organisations dedicated to specific pilgrimages such as the one at Sainte-Anne-de-Beaupr , where numbers have been climbing for the past decade, see Val rie Gaudreau, « Le tourisme religieux en hausse de 35 %   Qu bec », *Le Soleil*, July 23, 2014, (web), consulted January 13, 2019, <https://www.lapresse.ca/le-soleil/actualites/societe/201407/23/01-4786142-le-tourisme-religieux-en-hausse-de-35-a-Qu bec.php>. But more recently, as interest in religious heritage has waned, governments are increasingly declining their support for what is only a growing problem.

¹¹³ See Lefebvre, 2016, *Op. Cit.*, p. 493.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*

religious symbols for some government workers. Jacques Palard formulates these recent developments in Quebec as political regulation of religion and religious regulation of politics¹¹⁵.

Meunier's recent work shows that an analogous dual attitude towards religion was widespread, even within individual mentalities, and that religion remained an important aspect of national identity going into this process of reconfiguration¹¹⁶. His findings reveal that among cultural Catholics there was widespread disapproval of clericalism, on the one hand, counterbalanced on the other by a positive recognition of the Church's integral role in developing a French-Canadian national culture and for instilling positive values¹¹⁷. Far from anachronistic, Meunier explains that for adults raised in the cultural Catholic configuration, the Church "still shapes and moulds our imaginations, sometimes structuring them well beyond belief"¹¹⁸. His findings demonstrate that, even well into the new century, Quebecers had a 'love-hate' relationship with the Church¹¹⁹ characterised by generally positive views of baptism and Catholic identity and negative views towards clerical authority and intransigent institutional doctrine.

Of specific interest to francophone Quebecers' religious subjectivities towards their churches are Meunier's findings with respect to older Quebecers' deeply held, sincere views of Mass and

¹¹⁵ For example, with respect to religion regulating politics consider the Bouchard-Taylor Commission on 'reasonable accommodation' (2007-2008), the Parti Québécois' proposed Charter of Values (2013) and the most recent Liberal ban on the hijab for government employees (2017), see Gérard Bouchard, & Charles Taylor, *Building the Future: A time for reconciliation*, Government of Quebec, 2008. Regarding politics regulating religion think of the Commission de le patrimoine religieux and the roughly \$400 million invested in restoring churches.

¹¹⁶ See E.-Martin Meunier, « L'appartenance catholique des Québécois et son double », *Ethnographies du catholicisme contemporain*, Valérie Aubourg, Deirdre Meintel et Olivier Servais (dirs.), Paris, Karthala, 2021.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, original : « meuble et pétrit néanmoins encore tous les imaginaires, les structure parfois bien au-delà de ce qu'on peut croire », p.12

¹²⁰ See E.-Martin Meunier, & Sarah Wilkins-Laflamme, « Sécularisation, Catholicisme et transformation du régime de religiosité au Québec. Étude comparative avec le Catholicisme au Canada (1968-2007) », *Recherches Sociographiques*, 52(3), 2011, p. 683–729, <https://www.erudit.org/fr/revues/rs/2011-v52-n3-rs5005802/1007655ar.pdf>.

religious practice,¹²⁰ which until recently, informed a distinct type of cultural Catholicism¹²¹. This substantive relationship, he notes, differed from the instrumental identitary and politicised Catholicism, which sociologist of religions, Céline Béraud and political scientist Philippe Portier have observed in France¹²². He writes that across more than 40 in-depth interviews, '[t]he relationship with the Mass, and I would add Sunday Mass, since that's what we're talking about in particular, is omnipresent in what they say'¹²³. Across demographic and class differences, Meunier found a recurring theme of a 'guilty conscience' or rigorism. He writes:

[t]he recurrence of the question of Mass seems to be the trace of a kind of bad conscience... This bad conscience, the real stowaway of the religiosity of these Quebeckers, is, however, a demanding double. In a way, this double imprisons religiosity at the heart of an impossible demand that makes any deviation from the model of idealised behaviour tantamount to a breach of contract¹²⁴.

This type of attitude suggests a powerful affective investment in churches as physical and social repositories of an exacting moral ideal, which, however alienating its rigour, seemed to maintain wide support as an aspirational moral model¹²⁵.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*

¹²¹ *Ibid.*

¹²² Which the authors describe as more of a link between heritage and a specific ethical or political project citing for example the opposition to same sex marriage legislation which mobilised a surprising number of the French given their low religious practice, See Céline Béraud & Philippe Portier, *Métamorphoses catholiques*, Paris, Éditions de la maison des sciences de l'homme, 2015.

¹²³ See E.-Martin Meunier, « L'appartenance catholique des Québécois et son double », *Ethnographies du catholicisme contemporain*, in Valérie Aubourg, Deirdre Meintel et Olivier Servais (dirs.), Paris, Karthala, 2021, p. 14, original : « [l]e rapport à la messe, et j'ajouterais dominicale, puisque c'est de cela que l'on parle en particulier, est omniprésent, dans leur propos ».

¹²⁴ *Idem.*, p. 14-15, original: « [l]a récurrence de la question de la messe semble être la trace d'une sorte de mauvaise conscience ... Cette mauvaise conscience, véritable passager clandestin de la religiosité de ces Québécois, est toutefois un double exigeant. D'une certaine manière, ce double emprisonne la religiosité au cœur d'une exigence impossible qui rend toute variance au modèle de comportements idéalisés égale à une rupture de contrat ».

¹²⁵ *Idem.*, p. 16.

In his historical sociology of exculturation in Quebec, Meunier examines how institutional transformations since the 1960s modified Catholicism's cultural anchorage¹²⁶. Unlike in France, Meunier emphasises the impact of the scale and rapidity of secularisation in Quebec, writing that it is the result of an explicit process of disengagement from what Quebec's unique history had established, i.e. a society in which Catholicism had gradually 'taken over the entire experience of culture'^{127, 128}.

Thus, structurally, Quebec's socio-religious reconfiguration was not a product of its irrelevance but a conscious reaction to its dominance, not so much a rejection as an adjustment. So, despite institutional secularisation, cultural Catholicism remained latently impregnated by a religious cultural ambience and social consciousness for Baby Boomers and their children.

Catholicism's powerful cultural imprint, however, created momentum for further structural changes, which led to endogenous behavioural changes causing the gradual erosion of cultural Catholicism leading up to the period of exogenous religious pluralisation. Meunier traces these to changes to Quebec's socio-religious structure, citing, for example: the repatriation of the Canadian constitution (1982), which undermined francophone Catholic collective rights in favour of individual rights and multiculturalism; reforms to the civil code (1994), which gave the state full autonomy over marriage and birth records and registration; modifications to labour laws allowing businesses to open on Sundays, and the de-confessionalisation and secularisation of schools so that

¹²⁶ See Meunier, E.-Martin, « L'ancrage du Catholicisme au Québec et sa déliaison progressive : une sociologie historique de l'exculturation », in Solange Lefebvre, Céline Béraud et É.-Martin Meunier (dirs.), *Catholicisme et cultures. Regards croisés Québec-France*, Quebec City, Les Presses de l'Université Laval et Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2015, p. 21-44.

¹²⁷ Citing sociologist Nicole Gagnon.

¹²⁸ See E.-Martin Meunier, 2015, *Op. Cit.*

religious socialisation was no longer offered, and where sacraments were no longer distributed by default¹²⁹.

Recent and comprehensive quantitative data on sacrament distribution across Quebec's 19 dioceses demonstrates a correlation between changes to the Church-State structural arrangement and the sudden decline in the main indicators of Quebec's cultural Catholicism (high rate of identification and baptism until 2001)¹³⁰. Meunier and Jean-François Laniel argue that although rates of baptism had only declined 14 per cent between 1970 and 2001, in the subsequent 15 years the decline accelerated, dropping an additional 25 per cent¹³¹. Meanwhile, between 2001 and 2008, there were only 10 per cent fewer people who claimed a Catholic identity, which he acknowledges is less dramatic but likely only for the time being¹³².

These changes reflect a mutating ambivalence towards religion in Quebec, which, like France, demonstrates a deep attachment to its religious spaces, though rarely uses them as such. In Quebec attachment to religious heritage seems to have usurped the up-until recently more powerful ambivalent relationship to the Church as an institution. One only needs to look to France to discern the outlines of the new, perhaps de-complexified but no less powerful socio-religious configuration. Attachment to religion through heritage does not have the same theological and institutional dissonance of a cultural religion, and thus simplified, religion as heritage can provide

¹²⁹ *Idem.*, p. 32.

¹³⁰ See E.-Martin Meunier, Jean-François Laniel & Jean-Christophe Demers, « Permanence et recomposition de la religion culturelle. Aperçu socio-historique du catholicisme québécois (1970-2005) », in Robert Mager & Serge Cantin (dirs.), *Religion et modernité au Québec*, Quebec City, Les Presses de l'Université Laval, p. 79-128.

¹³¹ See E.-Martin Meunier, « L'appartenance catholique des Québécois et son double », in Valérie Aubourg, Deirdre Meintel et Olivier Servais (dirs.), *Ethnographies du Catholicisme contemporain*, Paris, Karthala, 2021, p. 8.

¹³² See E.-Martin Meunier, « L'ancrage du Catholicisme au Québec et sa déliaison progressive : une sociologie historique de l'exculturation », in Solange Lefebvre, Céline Béraud et É.-Martin Meunier (dirs.), *Catholicisme et cultures. Regards croisés Québec-France*, Quebec City, Les Presses de l'Université Laval et Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2015, p. 33.

a powerful unifying reference capable of remarkable mobilisation. Though the conflictual cases studied in the pages that follow showcase the difficult transition underway in Quebec, the example of Notre Dame de Paris demonstrates that patrimonialised religion holds a new and different kind of power. A poignant demonstration of this dynamic was expressed by French president Emmanuel Macron when Notre Dame de Paris violently burst into flames.

Notre Dame de Paris in flames. An entire nation is moved. Thoughts for all Catholics and all French people. Like all our compatriots, I am saddened this evening to see this part of us burn¹³³.

The president of the republic in his commentary likewise linked the fate of Notre-Dame to France's heritage and destiny, promising to rebuild the cathedral within five years and launching a fund which collected €1 billion in 24 hours¹³⁴. Whatever referential power religion maintains, and it is far from clear in France or Quebec, it is evident that it remains a powerful contemporary phenomenon. The choreography of the re-opening ceremony was revelatory in the way the Church and State cooperated while managing to elegantly maintain their respective purviews, with Macron leading celebrations to the parvis and Archbishop Laurent Ulrich taking the reins of the ceremony across the threshold. The restoration provides an apt example of Church-State collaboration and the capacity to draw the attention of millions of people to what is likely the best examples of the virility of the heritage religion configuration. Without apologising, the ceremony acknowledged Catholicism's primordial role in the history of France and the French people. Perhaps, as Palard

¹³³ See Emmanuel Macron, @EmmanuelMacron, *Twitter*, 15 April 2019, (web), consulted 17 May 2019, <https://twitter.com/EmmanuelMacron/status/1117851407644684288>; original: « Notre-Dame de Paris en proie aux flammes. Émotion de toute une nation. Pensée pour tous les catholiques et pour tous les Français. Comme tous nos compatriotes, je suis triste ce soir de voir brûler cette part de nous ».

¹³⁴ See Kim Wilsher, "Notre-Dame €1 bn fund pits Paris against provinces", *The Guardian*, April 20, 2019, (web), consulted, May 17, 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/apr/20/notre-dame-1bn-fund-pits-paris-against-provinces-gilets-jaunes-macron>.

argues, it is only when the clergy no longer wield power over politics, or put otherwise, once religion becomes heritage, that it can fully assume its historical importance without presenting a political threat. But to fully explore this line of questioning, we must first shed some light on the social processes and conditions at work in social transformation of historically rooted national Churches into national ‘religious heritage’.

C. From Cultural Religion to Religious Heritage

Quebec’s neighbourhood churches were not always considered religious heritage. Before the first wave of closures, which started in 1998, they were simply part of the cultural landscape. Indeed, during the 1980s and 1990s, the idea of heritage in Quebec was more about New France (1608–1763) than French Canada (1763–1960). Secondly, most of the churches were still syncretically part of the contemporary social order in Quebec. For elements of society to become ‘heritage’, they need to be fragile or extinct.

1. *Québec Discovers Religious Heritage*

An important expression of the patrimonialisation of French Canada was the 1982 establishment of a magazine dedicated to an expanded concept of heritage entitled *Continuité*. In the edition celebrating the review’s first anniversary, its editor articulates well the new spirit guiding heritage scholars and enthusiasts. Béatrice Verge writes,

[I]t’s already been a year since the word continuity was chosen to identify our magazine; this term fits in well with our perception of heritage, which is neither static nor restrictive; it brings together a wide range of cultural elements affecting our living environment¹³⁵.

¹³⁵ See Béatrice Verge, « Propos de la rédaction : Pour un patrimoine démocratisé », *Continuité*, Autumn, 1983, p. 4, original: « [i]l y a déjà un an, le mot continuité était choisi pour identifier notre magazine; ce terme correspond bien à notre perception du patrimoine, qui n’est ni statique ni restrictif; il rassemble un large éventail d’éléments culturels affectant notre cadre de vie ».

The same editorial note announced new heritage subjects, including maritime heritage, new museology, heritage buildings and, importantly, for the first time, religious heritage. Though architects and art historians had been studying Quebec's oldest churches since the 1920s and especially beginning in the 1970s with the cataloguing work by Luc Noppen, the 1980s was when churches built after the Conquest emerged as heritage subjects within professionalised and secular heritage circles.

Quebec's heritage expansion, professionalisation, and interpretive turn occurred in tandem with analogous movements in Britain, France and the United States¹³⁶. British geographer and critical heritage studies scholar, David Lowenthal, cites the 1979 World Heritage Convention, in which some 80 countries participated, as the beginning of the contemporary heritage preoccupation. He explains that the 1975 UNESCO protocols on World Heritage 'enthron[e] heritage as the sovereign core of collective identity and self-respect, a nutriment as necessary as food and drink'¹³⁷, and that, despite wide variation in content across cultures, the concept of heritage was and has remained quite stable. Lowenthal contends that heritage,

aims and traits are assessed in similar terms... The same concerns with precedent and antiquity, continuity and coherence, heroism and sacrifice surface again and again, nurturing family bonds, strengthening fealty, and stressing stewardship¹³⁸.

He explains the heritage growth of the 1980s as stemming from the loss and traumas of the 1970s when many began to lose faith in the promise of 'progress' and an acceptance of a waning optimism in the future,¹³⁹ which made the multiple dislocations of modernisation increasingly

¹³⁶ See David Lowenthal, *The Heritage Crusade and the Spoils of History*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1998, p. 4.

¹³⁷ *Idem.*, p. 5.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*

¹³⁹ Fuelled notably by economic recession, the OPEC crisis, urban decay, rising criminality and looming ecological crisis.

menacing¹⁴⁰. Lowenthal argues that heritage becomes a preoccupation whenever societies undergo rapid change and that accordingly, in the 1980s, after three decades of rapid modernisation, we started to

mourn worlds known to be irrevocably lost – yet more vividly felt, more lucid, more real than the murky and ambiguous present. We yearn for rooted legacies that enrich the paltry here and now with ancestral echoes yet also encumber us with outworn relics and obsolete customs. We see what has happened as inalterable... and cleave to timeless tradition’¹⁴¹.

By the mid-1990s, as almost anything ‘old’ became a potential subject of heritage, scholars came to view the phenomenon of heritage growth, not simply as a product of late modernity, but instead as a socio-historical process. British geographers of heritage John E. Turnbridge and Gregory J. Ashworth offered a simple formula for heritage as a process in 1996 as ‘a contemporary product shaped from history’¹⁴². By 1997, Swedish social anthropologist Åsa Boholm argued that the contemporary heritage obsession was not an historical anomaly, but insisted that, indeed, throughout history there have emerged periods of heritage preoccupation. The emphasis on continuity, preservation and reverence for the past conceals, according to Boholm, a process of “dynamic modification”, as external demands¹⁴³ hegemonically reconstruct traditions “in line with present authoritative desires”¹⁴⁴. In 1998, Lowenthal extended ‘heritage’ as a present-centred phenomenon, arguing that throughout history, it has emerged during periods of bitter social

¹⁴⁰ See David Lowenthal, *Op. Cit.*, p. 11, 25.

¹⁴¹ See David C. Harvey, “The History of Heritage”, in Brian Graham and Peter Howard (dirs.), *The Ashgate Research Companion to Heritage and Identity*, Farnham, U.K., Ashgate Publishing Ltd., 2008, p. 19-36.

¹⁴² See John E. Turnbridge & Gregory J. Ashworth, *Dissonant Heritage: The Management of the Past as a Resource in Conflict*, London, Belhaven, 1996, p. 20.

¹⁴³ In Québec, Fernand Harvey identifies three sets of external demands which informed its national heritage growth: 1), social upheavals including nationalism, feminism, secularism and socialism; 2), historiographical transformations towards social history; and 3), political developments, i.e. the creation of the department and later Ministry of Cultural Affairs in 1962. See Fernand Harvey, « La production du patrimoine », in Andrée Fortin (dir.), *Produire la culture, produire l'identité?*, Quebec City, Les Presses de l'Université Laval, p. 13, <https://www.erudit.org/en/books/culture-francaise-damerique/produire-culture-produire-lidentite/000576co.pdf>.

¹⁴⁴ See Åsa Boholm, “Reinvented Histories: Medieval Rome as Memorial Landscape”, *Ecumene*, 4(3), 1997, p.267.

dislocation and uncertainty, which require symbolic constructions used to project an uncertain future onto an idealised past. Lowenthal explains that

“dismay’ at massive change stokes demands for heritage. Market forces swiftly outdate most things now made or built; migration uproots millions from familiar locales; technology transforms familiar scenes at shocking speed... Beleaguered by loss and change, we keep our bearings only by clinging to remnants of stability”¹⁴⁵.

In his 2008 article “History of Heritage”, David C. Harvey acknowledges that, until recently, heritage had largely been the fiefdom of the aristocracy and the Catholic Church, who used it dynamically as a source of power from the medieval period until the Second Vatican Council¹⁴⁶. Since then, he notes, “a shift towards the Nation as the key axis through which heritage is replicated together with an increasing role of the state as arbiter”¹⁴⁷. One might observe that as Quebeckers in the 1960s demanded religion’s retreat from education, to compensate, secular society made incursions into the domain of cultural memory. As Harvey insists, the State, on behalf of the Nation, manages heritage in a present-centred fashion: by providing “prospective memories for the future that draw upon a reservoir of symbolic capital (or heritage) from the past”¹⁴⁸. Thus, one might question how the religious heritage produced by secular cultural forces draws on Quebec’s religious history to craft something distinct, oriented towards the Nation’s contemporary cultural and religious needs which, in 2025, are no longer the same as they were even 10 years ago. If approaches to religious heritage are unrecognisable in 2025 compared to 2015, one wonders the impact of accelerating closures on religion’s place in the public sphere and what that might indicate

¹⁴⁵ See David Lowenthal, *Op. Cit.*, p. 6.

¹⁴⁶ See David C. Harvey, *Op. Cit.* p. 23.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁸ *Idem.*, p. 22.

about the secularisation of the sacred dimensions of the French-Canadian Nation and if it can survive indefinitely without them. Are proponents of preserving Quebec Catholicism as heritage reacting consciously to this risk?

The heritage interpretation of Quebec's Catholic churches by secular professionals, or the prospective memories professionals have used them to craft, has also been informed by religious transformations, which have likewise been reshaping churches' potent cultural significations. Following the modernising years after the Second Vatican Council, the 1972 NFB film, *Tranquillement, pas vite*, captured in popular culture, the period's complicated relationship between religion and heritage. It depicted young Montreal intellectuals who enthusiastically embraced a radical interpretation of the new liturgy who argued that Quebec's traditional churches constrained human and spiritual development, and who thus supported their demolition in favour of modernist churches, specifically designed for a new democratic and open religious practice¹⁴⁹. Art historian Richard Gauthier suggests, the film's reception by the public produced the opposite of its intended effect. By brutally capturing the visual horror many Montrealers experienced in the first wave of urban church demolitions, Gauthier proposes that the film galvanised public consensus against not only church demolitions, but also church transformations more generally¹⁵⁰. Moreover, Gauthier posits that the first major update to Quebec's *Loi sur les biens culturels* in 1972 and the church demolitions in the Archdiocese of Montréal are directly linked. He cites an article in *La Presse*, which featured the reflections of a contemporary witness to support his claim, which notes that "[s]ince 1970, Montreal has been the scene of several church demolitions... In

¹⁴⁹ See Guy L. Côté, *Tranquillement, pas vite*, National Film Board of Canada, 1972. The film documents the relationship between the demolition of Montreal's Saint-Georges church and the liturgical reforms produced by the Second Vatican Council.

¹⁵⁰ See Richard Gauthier, « Le devenir de l'art de l'Église des paroisses catholiques au Québec : Architecture, arts, pratiques, patrimoine », doctoral dissertation, l'Université Laval, 2005, p. 4.

1972, the Quebec government had to adopt the Cultural Property Act to curb this trend”¹⁵¹. Thus, even within the secular sphere in the 1970s, and the State’s focus on promoting non-religious heritage, like that idealised at Place-Royale, successive governments were constrained by public opinion to make protecting religious heritage a priority for State-intervention.

2. *Religious Heritage: ad intra*

Around the same time, there emerged within the Church itself a parallel heritage consciousness provoked by the Church’s embrace of modernity. The Sacred Arts Committee for the dioceses, first of Quebec, then of Montreal, was initially tasked with overseeing conforming the decoration and architecture of traditional churches with official liturgy. Quebec’s Sacred Arts Committee, instituted in 1937, was of a decidedly conservative nature and was initially tasked with assuring, “the perfect conformity of the works of art with the requirements of liturgical law and good taste”¹⁵². Until the conclusion of the Second Vatican Council, the committee was reserved exclusively for the clergy. But, as Richard Gauthier demonstrates, by 1966 more than half of the committee was made up of laypeople who had enthusiastically embraced the liturgical reforms outlined in *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World*¹⁵³.

Between 1964 and 1966, the Committee preoccupied itself with reorganising the Diocese of Quebec’s churches to conform to the new liturgy. The enthusiasm for liturgical reform likely instigated the backlash driven by concerns about the preservation of traditional church property

¹⁵¹ See André Pépin, « Montréal, a-t-elle encore les moyens de s’offrir tant de lieux de culte? », *La Presse*, May 7, 1996, p. A-1 et A-2, original : « Depuis 1970, Montréal a été le théâtre de plusieurs démolitions d’églises ... En 1972, le gouvernement du Québec, pour enrayer ce mouvement, a dû adopter la Loi sur les Biens culturels ».

¹⁵² See Mgr. Jean-Marie-Rodrigue Villeneuve, « Communiqué de son éminence : Constitution du Comité diocésain d’action liturgique et des cérémonies, de la musique et des arts sacrés », *Semaine religieuse de Québec*, 49(23), February 4, 1937, p. 355-360, original : « la parfaite conformité des œuvres d’art avec les exigences des lois et du bon goût liturgique ».

¹⁵³ See Richard Gauthier, *Le devenir de l’art d’Église dans les paroisses catholiques du Québec : Architecture, arts, pratiques, patrimoine (1965-2002)*, Quebec City, Les Presses de l’Université Laval, 2005, p. 15-16.

and treasures menaced by liturgical reforms. This “conservationist movement”, Gauthier explains, gained influence to the point where, in its 1992 renewal of the Sacred Arts Committee’s mandate, the diocese granted its *lettres de noblesses*, when it officially recognised the pertinence of heritage in relation to Church property, even though heritage would remain subordinate to liturgy. In fact, the growing heritage movement within the Church, which increasingly gained influence over the Sacred Arts Committee, developed as an important vector for collaboration between the Church and the State. Gauthier notes that the Committee negotiated no fewer than 31 official collaborations with the Quebec State between 1966 and 1995, when the Quebec Religious Heritage Foundation would take over the function as an intermediary¹⁵⁴.

The Archdiocese of Montreal established its Sacred Arts Committee in very different circumstances, not to impose liturgical forms, but rather in response to the toll they were taking on the city’s churches. In the decade following the Second Vatican Council (1966-1976), 12 historic churches were demolished in Montreal, all supported by majority vote from parishioners who had embraced the modernist vision promoted by the new liturgy¹⁵⁵. These demolitions outraged intellectuals¹⁵⁶ as well as the public¹⁵⁷. Thus, principally preoccupied with heritage from the outset, Montreal’s Sacred Arts Committee established itself as an incubator for conceptualising, advocating and implementing policies for religious heritage and Abbé Claude Turmel emerged as one of its leading figures. One of his first projects was to lobby the Ministry of Culture to grant heritage status and protection to a similar proportion of Montreal’s churches as it did for Quebec

¹⁵⁴ *Idem.*, p. 23.

¹⁵⁵ *Idem.* P. 30.

¹⁵⁶ See Serge April, *et al.*, « Manifeste pour la sauvegarde des biens culturels », *Le Devoir*, 2 December 1972, p. 5.

¹⁵⁷ Archbishop Mgr. Paul Grégoire felt the need to appear on television to quell public outrage inspired by the demolitions on the January 20, 1973. During the broadcast he attempts to explain the diocese’s financial considerations while also offering assurances that all feasible measures would be taken to preserve the diocese’s churches. For details see, « Les démolitions d’églises », *L’Église sur la place*, TVA, 20 January 1973.

City's. The ministry responded by classing four churches by 1976. Likewise, Abbé Turmel exerted influence on Montreal's archbishop to implement a no-demolition policy, which took effect in 1975, the same year the final of the 12 historic churches, Saint-Jacques, was raised¹⁵⁸.

Yet, despite agreements between the diocese and the Ministry of Culture aimed at avoiding church demolitions and transformations formalised in 1975, a year later Abbé Turmel identified axiomatic differences in how the State and the Church conceived of heritage. In a brief issued May 11, 1976, Abbé Turmel explained the difference in approach, reminding the government that

the notion of 'classification', ..., does not mean protecting only works of intrinsically great architectural, artistic or historical value, but rather protecting buildings that we do not want to see disappear¹⁵⁹.

Successive governments ignored the language of the 1972 Cultural Property Law, which established a State role in the comprehensive restoration of buildings, furniture, artworks and even the environment, and instead pursued what Gauthier describes as funding "small occasional worksites ... sporadically granted by the provincial or federal governments for the upkeep of religious buildings"¹⁶⁰.

Failing to convince the government to adopt a State-supported strategy for church maintenance, which the Ministry of Culture - through successive decisions in 1979 - made clear it would not consider¹⁶¹, the Archdiocese of Montreal looked to parishioners to fund its moratorium on church demolitions. Beginning in 1980, implemented by Mgr. Paul Grégoire, the Archdiocese of

¹⁵⁸ See Richard Gauthier, *Op. Cit.*, p.33.

¹⁵⁹ *Idem.*, p. 34, original : « la notion de 'classement', ... ne signifie pas qu'on protège uniquement les œuvres d'une valeur architecturale, artistique ou historique intrinsèquement de grande valeur, mais plutôt qu'on protège des édifices qu'on ne veut pas voir disparaître ».

¹⁶⁰ *Idem.*, p. 34-35, original : « les petits chantiers occasionnels ... sporadiquement octroyés par les gouvernements provincial ou fédéral pour l'entretien de bâtiments religieux ».

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*

Montreal, established a policy of redistribution between rich and poor parishes, 90 per cent of which was devoted to building conservation¹⁶². In 1992, Cardinal Jean-Claude Turcotte formalised the practice with the creation of a mutual aid fund, which lent money from religious communities and wealthy parishes at extremely low interest rates to parishes which could never expect a market loan. In his 2005 testimony before the National Assembly's standing committee on culture hearings on religious heritage, the Montreal Archdiocese's supervisor of church sales, Louis-Philippe Desrosiers, explained that in 2004, 55 parishes borrowed \$6.8 million¹⁶³, and since its creation in 1992, it had been called upon by more than 100 parishes, mostly to support building works, which he noted represented, on average, 35 per cent of parish expenses in Montreal¹⁶⁴.

The logic behind this heritage approach was one of Church stewardship in view of preserving the vitality of a national institution, as opposed to the secular logic of commemorative conservation of some examples of the very old, architecturally rare, and aesthetically beautiful¹⁶⁵. In concert with the financial redistribution undertaken following the failure of a national strategy during the late 1970s, Abbé Turmel turned his attention to cultivating a sense of responsibility among parishioners for the stewardship of the Nation's churches. In a document entitled "To Restore in the Spirit of the Homeowner", Abbé Turmel reminded Quebecers that "they were morally titleholders of property that ultimately belongs to Quebec society as a whole"¹⁶⁶. This combination of mutual aid and parishioner stewardship allowed the archdiocese to maintain the *status quo*

¹⁶² Contemporary records are difficult to find, but for a retrospective account of the practice see, Pierre Maisonneuve, *Jean-Claude Turcotte, L'homme derrière le cardinal*, Montreal, Novalis, p. 118.

¹⁶³ See Fabien Venon, 2012, *Op. Cit.*, p. 109.

¹⁶⁴ Québec, Assemblée Nationale, Journal des débats de la commission sur la culture, 37^e législature, 1^{er} Session, (4 juin 2003 au 10 mars 2006), 38(50), September 20, 2005, hour 10.

¹⁶⁵ See the criteria for heritage classification in 2004 issued by Conseil de Patrimoine Religieux du Québec, "Aide Financière", Conseil de Patrimoine Religieux du Québec, 2019, (web), consulted 6 July 2019; <http://www.patrimoine-religieux.qc.ca/fr/aide-financiere>.

¹⁶⁶ See Claude Turmel, *Restaurer avec l'esprit du petit propriétaire*, Montreal, archevêché, January 1990. Paraphrased in Richard Gauthier, *Op. Cit.*, p. 35, original : « moralement titulaires de biens appartenant en définitive à l'ensemble de la société québécoise ».

despite plummeting religious practice and revenues. Contemporary reporting shows that in 1990, the Montreal Church was still, if just, breaking even with \$43 million in revenue compared to \$41.5 million in expenses¹⁶⁷.

Having thus established a system of mutual aid between affluent and poor parishes in the diocese of Montreal, Abbé Turmel sought to create a national organisation to coordinate the lobbying efforts of parishes and dioceses to more effectively organise the use of expertise and funds on a national scale. Baptised in 1993 as *Heritage Alive/Héritage Vivante*¹⁶⁸, the new ecumenical organisation created a joint fund of \$2.5 million, which quickly gained support from the federal and provincial governments, which respectively contributed \$2.5 million towards a fund for church restoration projects that year¹⁶⁹.

Meanwhile, despite the successful re-organisation of Church stewardship, spearheaded by Abbé Turmel and the Sacred Arts Committees, Montreal's diocesan hierarchy was already sending signals of distress by 1992. In an interview with *La Presse*, published that year, Mgr. Turcotte mused about how church closures and sales could offer a way to relieve the Church "of a heavy weight on her shoulders"¹⁷⁰. In the same article Mgr. Turcotte underscored his view that "the buildings... they're gifts from the Greeks. They cost a fortune to run"¹⁷¹; a position which signalled the hierarchy's objective to gain support for the reversal of its 1979 church closure moratorium through an archdiocesan synod held between 1995 and 1998. The synod, of which French social-geographer Fabien Venon provides a detailed account, concluded with a new policy which

¹⁶⁷ See Jacques Benoît, 1992 (2 mai), « L'Église est-elle aussi riche qu'on le pense? », *La Presse*, May 2, 1992, p. F-1.

¹⁶⁸ It was re-named *Pierre Vivantes/Living Stones* in 1994, see Richard Gauthier, *Op. Cit.* p.35.

¹⁶⁹ See Nathalie Tomasi, « La Fondation du patrimoine religieux », *Le Patrimoine religieux du monde rural*, UQTR, Département des sciences humaines, 1999, p. 75.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, original: « d'un bon poids sur les épaules ».

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, original: « les bâtisses ... ce sont des cadeaux de Grecs. Ça coûte une fortune à administrer ».

established a framework for parish fusions and closures, which was used to shutter 40 churches during the subsequent six years¹⁷². The new approach to Quebec's churches by the Montreal chancellery signalled the beginning of the Church's long-avoided retreat from responsibility for Quebec's religious heritage, and a shift towards institutional reorganisation with the aim of redeploying its resources according to the interests and priorities of roughly five per cent of practising Catholics, who, though smaller in number, were more committed to official Church practices. In other words, Montréal's 1995-1998 synod officially opened the door to the denationalisation and privatisation of the Quebec Church, meaning it would no longer privilege the priorities of the majority of non-practising Quebecers, who overwhelmingly opposed church closures. Venon highlights this change, citing the Montreal diocesan hierarchy's practices of limiting synodal engagement to practising Catholics as opposed to active consultation of all adult baptised Catholics in its territory. He writes that, "the Church did not wish to extend the debate beyond the small circle of the regular faithful, who were heavily involved in local religious life"¹⁷³. While the synod did use a democratic approach to address the problem of Quebec's churches, Mgr. Turcotte, Venon notes, was not willing to give "latitude to a vast debate, fearing that the discussions would get bogged down with parties less legitimate to the process than practising Catholics"¹⁷⁴. The timing of this change corresponds with a major shift in dioceses' finances which until the 1990s were generally healthy.

In 1997, speaking to the "First international conference on the future of the Churches", organised by Luc Noppen and Lucie K. Morisset in Montreal, Abbé Turmel acknowledged the tension

¹⁷² See Fabien Venon, 2012, *Op. Cit.*, p. 107-108 & Fabien Venon, *Les paroisses au défi de la modernité*, Paris, L'Harmattan, 2013.

¹⁷³ See Fabien Venon, 2012, *Op. Cit.*, p. 110, original: « *l'Église ne tient pas à étendre le débat au-delà du petit cercle des fidèles réguliers, fortement impliqués dans la vie religieuse locale* ».

¹⁷⁴ *Idem.*, p.114, original: « *toute latitude à un vaste débat, craignant que les discussions ne s'enlisent avec des intervenants moins légitimistes que les pratiquants réguliers* ».

between practising and non-practising Catholics over the question of churches in his address, noting that, often,

it's people who are distant from the Church who judge us most harshly when we compromise the sanctity of places of worship. This aspect is in danger of being too easily overlooked. Think of the sanctity that is in danger of being sorely lacking at a time when so many people are longing for a spiritual awakening. Think of everything that comes into play. We are touching on psychological depths, a symbolic universe, and a heritage of meaning that cannot be taken lightly. When we respect the primary function of a church, aren't we doing a service to a society that needs spiritual spaces? ¹⁷⁵

Pleading for a compromise on church stewardship¹⁷⁶, between those who promote the mutual exclusivity of religious and secular uses of the Nation's churches, Turmel's position, calling for a Durkheimian institutional transformation of Quebec's churches, was, in the 1990s, losing allies among the clergy. It was also failing to convince the increasingly influential secular heritage establishment of churches' essential sacred-social function. Gauthier formulates Turmel's approach to religious heritage as one that served neither the ecclesiastical interests of an increasingly conservative institution, nor the instrumental preoccupations of heritage professionals. "He calls for worship, not in the name of the Church's need for orthodoxy, but to meet the spiritual needs of his fellow citizens"¹⁷⁷. In opposition to Abbé Turmel's idealistic approach, which promoted the conservation of the religious and national functions of Quebec's

¹⁷⁵ See conference proceedings in Luc Noppen, Lucie K. Morisset & Robert Caron (dirs.), *La conservation des églises dans les villes-centres*, Quebec City, Les éditions Septentrion, 1997, original: « *ce sont les gens distants de l'Église qui nous jugent le plus sévèrement quand on compromet le caractère sacré des lieux de culte. Cet aspect risque d'être trop facilement négligé. Pensons au caractère sacré qui risque de faire cruellement défaut alors que tant de gens aspirent à un éveil spirituel. Songeons à tout ce qui entre en jeu. On touche à des profondeurs psychologiques, à un univers symbolique, à un héritage de sens qu'on ne peut prendre à la légère. Quand on respecte la fonction première d'une église, ne rend-on pas service à une société qui a besoin d'espaces spirituels?* ».

¹⁷⁶ Which I define as the responsibility for care of church buildings, along with the governance models to achieve this maintenance.

¹⁷⁷ See Richard Gauthier, *Op. Cit.*, p. 38, original : « *il revendique le culte, non pas au nom d'un besoin culturel de l'Église, mais pour répondre aux besoins spirituels de ses concitoyens* ».

churches, the clergy and heritage professionals were faced with finding more practical solutions. The former counted on church closures as a means to lighten the financial and staffing challenges posed by underused churches, while the latter viewed church closures as a way of focusing conservation efforts on the achievements of Quebec's artists and architects. Both groups looked to the revenues from church sales as a means to finance these pragmatic objectives. On the one hand, the clergy sought to avoid complete bankruptcy, and on the other, heritage professionals sought to preserve at least a trace of the beauty which so inspired Abbé Turmel. Importantly, both groups agreed that though religious heritage was now consecrated as a public good, that religion, to save itself and its spiritual heritage, would now be private¹⁷⁸.

Mgr. Turcotte's position was that "the Church is not there to be a caretaker of museums"¹⁷⁹, while the secular heritage establishment, led by Noppen and Morisset, argued that "if you want to keep everything ... you risk losing everything"¹⁸⁰. They would later affirm their position, insisting that "it is [...] illusory to believe that we will conserve more than 40% of the buildings [...], history, our resources and reason corroborate this state of affairs"¹⁸¹. The reigning consensus, which opposed closing or transforming churches, was over.

Within the institution, in addition to the 1995-1998 synod, the Church established a protocol for closing and selling churches in 1998 Mgr. Turcotte promulgated canonical legislation, article C-

¹⁷⁸ These perspectives are evident in the rhetoric used by the Quebec clergy insisting that limited Church resources ought to be devoted to evangelism instead of building maintenance.

¹⁷⁹ Quebec, Assemblée Nationale, Journal des débats de la commission sur la culture, 37^e législature, 1^{er} Session, (June 42003 to March 10, 2006), September 20, 2005, 38(50), hour 10:10, original: « *l'Église n'est pas là pour être un musée d'entretien des édifices* ».

¹⁸⁰ See Luc Noppen, Lucie K. Morisset & Robert Caron, *Op. Cit.*, p. 148, original: « *à vouloir tout conserver ... on risque de tout perdre* ».

¹⁸¹ See Noppen, Luc et Lucie K. Morisset, « L'avenir des églises du Québec : contours et enjeux », in Turgeon, Laurier (dir.), *La patrimoine religieux du Québec: entre le cultuel et le culturel*, Quebec City, Les Presses de l'Université Laval, 2005, p. 272, original: « *il est [...] illusoire de croire que l'on conservera plus de 40 % des bâtiments [...], l'histoire, nos moyens et la raison corroborent cet état de fait* ».

20, which led to the National Church inventory, to empower it to undertake an inventory of its real estate holdings with the purpose of evaluating properties' heritage value with the aim of effecting a triage¹⁸². It is important to emphasise that the Church had up until this point resisted demands by the State to rank its churches and had, in fact, foregone considerable State subsidies and legal protections to uphold Abbé Turmel's view that all churches have heritage value¹⁸³. Article C-20 set in motion a collaboration with the State and the secular heritage establishment that instituted "a difference in grade between places of worship considered to be mere real estate, which can be put to new uses, and those considered worthy of heritage status"¹⁸⁴. These efforts led to the National Places of Worship Inventory carried out between 2003 and 2004, which documented and catalogued 4,567 religious buildings and 2,751 temples of worship¹⁸⁵.

Ironically, Turmel's national organisation, *Pierres Vivantes*/Living Stones, seems to have contributed to the ascendance of the professionalised secular heritage model with respect to the stewardship of Quebec's churches¹⁸⁶. Following the mixed model advanced by Turmel, which envisioned expanded secular use of churches which retained their ecclesiastical vocations, the new model rested upon the conceptual distinction of religion from heritage. For Noppen and Morisset,

¹⁸² See Marcel Lefebvre, *Le synode diocésain de Montréal 1995-1998, La dernière étape : l'Assemblée synodale (24-25 octobre et 28-29 novembre 1998)*, Montreal, Fides, 1999, p. 78.

¹⁸³ See Richard Gauthier, 2005, *Op. Cit.*, p. 34.

¹⁸⁴ See Fabien Venon, 2012, *Op Cit.*, p. 121, original: « une différence de classes entre des lieux de culte considérés comme de simples biens immobiliers, qui peuvent connaître de nouveaux usages, et ceux qui sont jugés dignes d'appartenir au patrimoine ».

¹⁸⁵ See Québec, « Inventaire des lieux de culte au Québec », Ministry of Culture and Communications », 2004, (web) consulted May 16, 2019, <http://www.patrimoine-culturel.gouv.qc.ca/rpcq/detailInventaire.do?methode=consulter&id=4&type=inv#.XN2DQehKjMU>.

¹⁸⁶ See for example, « Au tour des citoyens de sauver leur église », *Le Québec Express*, May 20, 2015, (web), consulted January 13, 2019, <https://www.Québechebdo.com/uncategorized/107296/au-tour-des-citoyens-de-sauver-leur-egli-4153210/>.

it is imperative to distinguish between heritage and worship; the former belongs to the public, collective and civil domain, while the latter is private; this is one of the reasons why a secular state can look after heritage but not worship ¹⁸⁷.

Thus, as it became the centre of gravity for religious heritage activity, the organisation increasingly attracted actors for whom the religious functions of churches were secondary to their secular artistic, architectural, and urban dimensions. The organisation's transformation from an ecumenical and civil society organisation to an arm's-length government commission confirmed Abbé Turmel's observation that since the creation of the Sacred Arts Committee in the 1970s, religious heritage in Quebec "is less and less the exclusive concern of pastors and the faithful"¹⁸⁸.

This became especially true in 1995, when the Quebec State dramatically expanded and officialised its role in managing and supporting religious heritage when it partnered with *Pierres Vivantes*/Living Stones to create the Quebec Religious Heritage Foundation. The group's agreement with the Ministry of Culture guaranteed considerable long-term funding for restorations and promotion of religious buildings on a national scale¹⁸⁹. Between its creation in 1995 and 2025, the Foundation financed hundreds of conservation interventions at a cost of \$620 million¹⁹⁰. Despite the significant State-funding for church restorations, the distribution of those funds via the Foundation was considerably restricted. Churches would be eligible for funding according to heritage ranking and building age (built before 1945). In fact, of the 1,554 Quebec Churches that

¹⁸⁷ See Luc Noppen & Lucie K. Morisset, 2005, *Op. Cit.*, p. 79, original: « *il devient impératif que l'on distingue patrimoine et culte ; le premier est du domaine public, collectif et civil, tandis que le second est de l'ordre du privé; c'est d'ailleurs l'un des motifs qui sous-tend qu'un État laïc puisse s'occuper du patrimoine, mais pas du culte* ».

¹⁸⁸ See Luc Noppen, Lucie K. Morisset & Robert Caron, *Op. Cit.*, p. 30, « *est de moins en moins la préoccupation exclusive des pasteurs et des fidèles* ».

¹⁸⁹ See « À propos : historique », Conseil du patrimoine religieux du Québec, 2024, (web), consulted October 25, 2024, <https://www.patrimoine-religieux.qc.ca/fr/aide-financiere>.

¹⁹⁰ See "Aide Financière", Conseil de Patrimoine Religieux du Québec, 2019, (web), consulted 6 July 2019; <http://www.patrimoine-religieux.qc.ca/fr/aide-financiere>, and François Dufaux, « Reconnaître la spiritualité des valeurs immatérielles dans l'acte de débâter le patrimoine religieux du Québec », *Études d'histoire religieuse*, 78(2), 2012, p. 6.

received heritage rankings of A, B, or C, out of the 2,751 inventoried, only 36 per cent, or 572, were eligible for State subsidies¹⁹¹. With State-funding focused on old and rare churches and as dioceses across the province ceased supporting unprofitable churches, between 1998 and 2004 an unprecedented 96 churches closed their doors¹⁹². Popular reaction to these closures once again, as in 1979, forced the government's hand to widen its interpretation of 'heritage' from that established between the clergy and the secular heritage establishment. Quebeckers were clearly still invested in their churches in the widest sense. Was it because the phenomenon was still novel or was it that 20 years ago Quebeckers' religious sensibility was keener than it is in 2025 when hardly any group protests massive cuts to religious heritage funding¹⁹³.

3. *Politicisation: ad extra*

With voters across Quebec reeling in response to church closures, the National Assembly's Commission on Culture held public consultations from September 20, 2005, to January 25, 2006, devoted to examining the State's role with respect to the future of Quebec's religious heritage. The Commission received 120 briefs, 69 online questionnaire responses and 102 presentations¹⁹⁴. Recommendations fell into four broad categories: 1), knowledge of religious heritage (the inventory); 2), protecting religious heritage (a proposed moratorium on church closures to last until January 1, 2008, which was never imposed, as well as creating a legislated mechanism for church alienation, which took effect in 2008, requiring clergy to advertise church sales to municipalities,

¹⁹¹ See Lyne Bernier, « Les églises et les bâtiments à caractère religieux de Montréal : de la francisation à la patrimonialisation », volume 4, doctoral dissertation, département of Aménagement d'espace et urbanisme, Université de Bretagne occidentale-Brest, 2015, p. 339.

¹⁹² See Annex I.

¹⁹³ See Jean-François Nadeau, « Québec coupe les fonds pour la préservation des églises », *Le Devoir*, June 18, 2025, (web), consulted February 21, 2026, <https://www.ledevoir.com/politique/quebec/892621/quebec-coupe-fonds-preservation-eglises>.

¹⁹⁴ See Quebec, National Assembly, « Croire au patrimoine religieux du Québec », Ministère de la Culture et des Communications, 2006, (web), consulted February 28, 2025, p. 7, https://bibliotheque.cecile-rouleau.gouv.qc.ca/documents/archives/pgq/A11A8_C76_2006.pdf.

not-for profits or other religious groups for at least a year before private sales); 3), transmission of religious heritage (the creation of an arm's-length council of religious heritage, Religious Heritage Council, in 2007 on the base of the former Religious Heritage Foundation (FPRQ), established in 1995¹⁹⁵); and lastly 4), management of religious heritage (the enumeration of powers and funding responsibilities of the Religious Heritage Council)¹⁹⁶. As a result of the commission, between 2007 and 2012, funding for the CPRQ's investments in Church renovations nearly doubled from \$47,661,131 between 2001 and 2006 (FPRQ), to \$86,605,182 from 2007 to 2012¹⁹⁷, as the State expanded its direct subsidies for church renovations across its territory. It should be noted that the Religious Heritage Council also invests a much smaller but still considerable sum on documenting oral histories, restoring ecclesiastical arts, crafts, furniture, and archives.

The Commission on Culture and Education held another round of public hearings on heritage in general from January until March 2011. It received 56 briefs mostly from municipalities, heritage-oriented professional organisations and arts groups and led to meaningful policy development. Universally adopted, the new legislation expanded penalties for non-compliant heritage property owners, encouraged the creation of local heritage councils, and increased local powers of heritage designation. Bill-82, the fruit of the commission, sought to expand the State's definition of heritage and modernise its policies to account for the larger heritage role assumed by municipalities. If the policies between 1998 and 2011 were deeply influenced by art historians and historians of architecture, Bill-82 inscribed itself in the approach of the developing field of religious heritage in urban studies, which values churches as hubs of identity, cultural anchorage and collective

¹⁹⁵ See « Rapport Annuel 2016-2017 », Conseil de patrimoine religieux du Québec, 2017, (web), consulted May 17, 2019, <https://www.patrimoine-religieux.qc.ca/fr/publications/rapport-annuel>.

¹⁹⁶ See Quebec, National Assembly, « Croire au patrimoine religieux du Québec », Ministère de la Culture et des Communications, 2006, (web), consulted February 28, 2025, p. 61-64, https://bibliotheque.cecile-rouleau.gouv.qc.ca/documents/archives/pgq/A11A8_C76_2006.pdf.

¹⁹⁷ See Conseil du patrimoine religieux du Québec, rapports annuels, CPRQ Annual Reports, 2001-2012.

spaces¹⁹⁸. In keeping with the decentralisation of heritage policy, in 2016 the Quebec State, through the Religious Heritage Council, expanded eligibility by 30 years to churches built before 1975, making virtually all of Quebec's francophone Catholic churches eligible for State support, but notably disqualifying the infrastructure of newly arrived religious groups. This practice is consistent with the Quebec State's understanding of official secularity (*laïcité*).

Thus, the construction of Quebec's Catholic churches as heritage has since the 1970s been defined by three moments. First, it was characterised by an ambivalent reaction to declining religious practice and urban transformations throughout the 1970s and 1990s, borne by a national Church still determined to adapt. Second, in the late 1990s until circa 2010, the heritage establishment historicised and secularised churches as works of art, inherited by an irreversibly secularised Nation. Third, since 2010, populist attachment to churches has challenged both the clergy's practices of religious privatisation as well as the heritage establishment's insistence on wholesale desacralisation. Among the constituencies that have assumed this position, there has been unleashed a *guerre des clochers*, or turf war, as one parish competes with another for heritage recognition and the funds that come with it.

These popular demands, however, have emerged at a time when calls for secularism have never before been so varied and forcefully demanded by majority swaths of Quebec society¹⁹⁹. At first blush, it appears that Quebec is undergoing material resistance to its secularisation, but could it also be true that for secularism to succeed, the State needs religious heritage? By that I suggest

¹⁹⁸ See Lyne Bernier, 2015, *Op. Cit.*

¹⁹⁹ See E.-Martin Meunier & François Olivier Dorais, « Nous sommes dans un changement devant la continuité », *L'action nationale*, May, 2019, (web), consulted August 26, 2025, <https://action-nationale.qc.ca/pl21-nous-sommes-devant-un-changement-dans-la-continuite/>.

that the State has a stake in how its national religious referent is managed, especially since the Church, its caretaker up until now, has evacuated its traditional role. Following Dumont's dialectic model, secularism is meaningless if there is nothing to measure it against. Of greater concern, given the contours of contemporary religious pluralisation, if Catholicism can no longer provide that referent, what might take its place?

4. *Examples of Interpretations from Other Fields.*

Seriously, considering the portent of religious heritage requires diverse perspectives and Quebec is luckier than most societies to have so many scholars committed to the question working in diverse fields. To name only a few, Luc Noppen and Lucie K. Morisset have tirelessly made the secular case for Quebec's churches as important works of art and their work has been instrumental in the identification of which works should remain collective property and not subject to market speculation, much to the chagrin of the Church, which has an interest in exchanging their weighty holdings to support its current pastoral priorities. They sounded the alarm before any other secular actors of the need for the State to assume the burden of religious heritage²⁰⁰.

Urbanist Lyne Bernier was among the first to raise questions about how religious decline would impact Quebec's cities, which the heavy institutional presence of the Catholic Church has made so distinct and liveable. Her work answered the riddle a decade ago of why so many non-practising Quebecers react so forcefully to church closure: churches are good for urban spaces on a material and cultural level and that the way they are turned into heritage is vital to maximising their future contributions to the urban fabric²⁰¹. Others, like political sociologist Geneviève Zubrzycki, view

²⁰⁰ See Luc Noppen & Lucie K. Morisset, *Quel Avenir pour Quelles Églises*, Quebec City, Presses de l'Université du Québec, 2006.

²⁰¹ See Lyne Bernier, *Les églises et les bâtiments à caractère religieux de Montréal : de la francisation à la patrimonialisation*, doctoral dissertation, Université de Bretagne, 2015.

the translation of churches into heritage politically, suggesting its symbolic residue is mobilised instrumentally and reflexively in response to national questions such as independence, or identity anxiety caused by ethnic and religious diversification²⁰². Still others, such as religious scientist Louis Rousseau, see the patrimonialisation of religion as a secular normative displacement, preserving the aspects of Catholicism as Quebec's 'cultural values' and a source of national distinction.²⁰³ Theologians have not ignored the phenomenon either. Solange Lefebvre identified a crucial dimension of church closure in her work on religious transmission. She demonstrates that younger generations, those under 35, have almost no general access to religious referents, which raises important questions for the patrimonialisation of heritage: what will be the consequences of its unintelligibility for its heirs?²⁰⁴.

Understanding the material, political, and philosophical implications of the Church's Québec eclipse is vitally important. However, there are still some 1,500 active Catholic churches operating in Québec, though that figure declines all the time. My research seeks to fill a gap by taking a step back and waiting to ring the death knell of Quebec Catholicism, to document and examine what is happening now as a period of transition away from Cultural Catholicism and to examine what a religious heritage configuration might look like. The Catholic Church is not disappearing in Quebec and probably will not for the foreseeable future. What is dying is the Church's public role, so, what, if anything, will replace its national function?

D. Research Questions.

²⁰² See for example, Geneviève Zubrzycki, *Beheading the Saint. Nationalism, Religion and Secularism in Québec*, Chicago & London, University of Chicago Press, 2016.

²⁰³ See Louis Rousseau, « La Construction Religieuse de la Nation », *Recherches Sociographiques*, 46(3), September-December 2006, p. 437-452.

²⁰⁴ Solange Lefebvre, (dir.), *Le Patrimoine religieux du Québec. Éducation et transmission du sens*, préface de Jocelyn Groulx, Quebec City, Les Presses de l'Université Laval, 2009.

We began with the questions, “why do Quebeckers react so strongly to church closures, though, so few ever use them?”; “what do those reactions reveal about religion’s role in the processes of cultural change”? And more broadly “how do Quebeckers make sense of so many churches closing so suddenly in relation to cultural changes affecting the Nation”? To begin parsing these, a review of intellectual discourse examined how scholars have interpreted and discussed the nature and significance of Catholicism in relation to the national reference. Next, we examined how historical forces, social configurations, and the dynamics of cultural change have intersected to produce ‘religious heritage’, what that production consists of, and what it might mean for Quebec’s religious, civil society, and political spheres.

Quebec society has been undergoing a dramatic institutional religious decline for at least the past 50 years and for the past 20 years that decline has expressed itself via a massive wave of church closures. This thesis is dedicated to asking Quebeckers involved in church closure about their relationships to Catholic churches, how they react to their closures, what motivates them to engage in the process, and how they square that action with their worldviews of the Nation and Society they respectively belong to and form? Taking into consideration the context provided above, this research asks broadly:

What does the social resistance to church closures between 1998 and 2025 indicate about the relationships between the simultaneous processes of religious heritage construction and the growing distance between religion and culture? Moreover, what can the dynamic between these socio-historic processes reveal about the privatisation of public religions in increasingly individualistic societies with historically established Churches?

This double-barrel question contains three lines of inquiry.

1. What are the social roles involved in church closures, who occupies them, what are their motives and what do actors believe about the significance of their participation?
2. How are these influenced by political, institutional and historiographical structures and discourses?
3. What are the religious dimensions of these interactions and what do they reveal about patterns of, and attitudes towards, contemporary sociocultural change?

Together, these questions are oriented around trying to understand the response to the secularisation of a religiously constituted culture. Is religious heritage the symptom of or the antidote to the challenges presented by cultural Catholicism's progressive decline? Rather than solely documenting the causes and effects of Quebec's contemporary wave of church closures, which is important work, this research seeks to answer these sense-oriented questions via an *in situ* social analysis of church closure. In her discussion of how to study "vicarious religion", Davie advises just such an approach. She recommends that in order to investigate the deep but hidden reflexes of a population,

[o]ne line of approach lies in observing human behaviour (collective as well as individual) at the moments when "normal" ways of living are, for one reason or another, suspended and something far more instinctive comes to the fore (...) The crucial point to grasp in terms of sociological method is the need to be attentive to episodes, whether individual or collective, in or through which the implicit becomes explicit, or the abnormal normal.²⁰⁵

Granting church closures as "abnormalities" for a socio-religious configuration, which, as Lemieux and Meunier demonstrate remained, until recently, largely stable with respect to the indicators of belonging and identification, attention will now turn to outlining the most appropriate

²⁰⁵ See Grace Davie, 2008, *Op. Cit.*, p.169-170.

theoretical approach for a social study of church closures, episodes which make long-term latent and implicit socio-religious transformation suddenly sociologically visible.

E. Theoretical contextualisation.

This is an empirical thesis; however, my interpretation has been guided by contemporary theoretical currents in the Sociology of Religions. What follows is a synthesis of concepts which I have found useful to make sense of the patterns I have observed after having spent years observing the phenomenon of church closure in Quebec. To respond to the questions posed above requires articulating theoretical perspectives on institutions, secularisation, religious transformation, cultural change, and the conflicts they engender, all of which are the classic subjects of sociology.

1. *Classical Theory Under a Contemporary Light*

What exactly is a Church? To answer that question, it is best to look back to Ernst Troeltsch's *Utopian Forms of Religious Life*²⁰⁶ and Max Weber's *Economy and Society*²⁰⁷. In a synthesis of their pioneering definitions, theologian and sociologist of religions Erik Sengers outlines the classic understanding of what constitutes a Church.²⁰⁸ Sengers writes that for Weber and Troeltsch, Churches²⁰⁹ were universal; thus, their claims affect everyone and all institutions in each society. They project the whole community and are organised rationally and bureaucratically. Membership is not voluntary; people are born into them and ideally remain within them for life. Churches are allied with the State. Sengers continues, writing that Weber and Troeltsch share the view that the

²⁰⁶ See Ernst Troeltsch, *The Social Teaching of the Christian Churches*, translated by Olive Wyon, London, George Allen and Unwin, 1931, p. 367-372; p. 967-971.

²⁰⁷ See Max Weber, *Economy and society: An outline of interpretive sociology*, Guenther Roth & Claus Wittich (dirs.), Berkeley, University of California Press, 1978, [1922]. p. 688-726.

²⁰⁸ See Erik Sengers, "The concept of 'church' in sociology and global society: genealogy of a word and transformation of a position", *International Journal for the Study of the Christian Church*, 12(1), February 2012, p. 56.

²⁰⁹ As opposed to sects which are voluntary, denominational and private.

Church needs the State to achieve its universal claims, and the State needs the Church for supernatural legitimation. An important question guiding this work is if that concept is still appropriate to analyse these institutions today?

Sengers' work on the decline of Churches in the Netherlands²¹⁰ argues that correspondence to the ideal definition of "Church" has been declining since the 1970s²¹¹ due to a combination of factors such as globalisation, pluralisation, and a growing distance between religious and political elites. He suggests that all European nations are in the midst of a socio-religious reconfiguration, the trajectories of which he predicts could be, a), further marginalisation (Churches serve a smaller but more committed membership), b), a revitalisation (resulting from effective responses to the challenging consequences of globalisation), or c), civilisational (Churches become the repositories and guardians of national values and rituals)²¹². Following Sengers, Churches cease to fulfil the total institutional role they once performed when their 1), bureaucracies break down, 2), political and religious elites polarise, 3), membership loses its passivity and 4), visions of the world no longer represent society as a whole²¹³. These are all vectors present in Quebec's case and rapidly on the rise.

2. *Secularisation*

Underlying these changes, the most accepted, yet constantly renovated concept to describe the socio-historical motor driving religious change is the notion of "secularisation"²¹⁴. Secularisation emerged as a collection of interrelated ideas articulating Christian belief, practice, and

²¹⁰ The European nation most-affected by church closures to date. See the above section on Regimes of *Laïcité*.

²¹¹ See Erik Sengers, *Op. Cit.*, p. 64.

²¹² *Idem.*, p. 66-68.

²¹³ *Idem.*, p. 68.

²¹⁴ See William H. Swatos & Kevin J. Christiano, "Secularization Theory: The Course of a Concept", *The Sociology of religion*, 60(3), 1999, p.209-228.

organisation, with modernity in the 1950s and 1960s²¹⁵ among theologians, religious historians, and sociologists, to describe and explain the declining social significance of institutional religion²¹⁶. Each discipline approached the concept distinctly. Theologians focused on liberation and autonomisation; religious historians studied institutional differentiation; sociologists examined societal rationalisation. They tended to share the view of Charles Wright Mills, who, summarising the process, writes,

[o]nce the world was filled with the sacred – in thought, practice, and institutional form. After the Reformation and the Renaissance, the forces of modernisation swept across the globe and secularisation, a corollary historical process, loosened the dominance of the sacred. In due course, the sacred shall disappear altogether except, possibly, in the private realm.²¹⁷

By the 1960s, secularisation became orthodoxy in social science, which held it up as a unitary, linear, and almost natural consequence of industrialisation, urbanisation and individualisation, in sum, of modernity. As sociologist of religions, David Martin recently commented, “secularisation was both noted and promoted”²¹⁸. Another sociologist of religions, Danièle Hervieu-Léger, formulates the assumptions underlying classical secularisation theory, writing that social scientists interpreted the triple pressures of a), affirmation of the individual, b), the process of rationalisation, and c), institutional differentiation, as leading to the inevitable decline of religion and the loss of

²¹⁵ Embryonic formulations of ‘secularization’ can be found in Max Weber, *The Protestant Work Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, translated by Talcott Parsons & Anthony Giddens, New York, Scribners, 1930, as well as in Ernst Troeltsch, *Protestantism and Progress*, translated by W. Montgomery, Boston, Beacon Press, 1958.

²¹⁶ See, for example, Peter L. Berger, *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory*, New York, Doubleday, 1967; Harvey Cox, *The Secular City: Secularization and Urbanization in Theological Perspective*, New York, Collier Books, 1965; James Hastings Nichols, *History of Christianity, 1650-1950: Secularization of the West*, New York, Ronald Press, Inc., 1956; Thomas Luckmann, *The Invisible Religion: The Problem of Religion in America*, New York, Macmillan, 1967, and Bryan Ronald Wilson, *Religion in a Secular Society*, London, C.A. Watts, 1966.

²¹⁷ See Charles Wright Mills, *The Sociological Imagination*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1959, p. 32-33.

²¹⁸ See David Martin, *On Secularization: Towards a Revised General Theory*, Farnham, U.K., Ashgate, 2005, p. 8.

religious institutions' power in modern societies²¹⁹. Modern societies, she writes, are “rationally disenchanted, in which the question of ‘how?’ increasingly tends to take precedence over the question of ‘why?’”²²⁰. As such, secularisation became tied to ideas of societal development and progress. Religious societies were thought to be remaining in a state of tutelage, their faith held up as evidence for their dependence and irrationalism.

In 1978, David Martin's *A General Theory of Secularization* used, for the first time, a comparative typological approach to map out “secularisation stories” or pathways²²¹. Martin identified “cultural filters”,²²² which considered a nation's religious landscape, its political culture and what today would be called, ‘secular regime’. He argued that while secularisation is often progressive, it develops dialectically between Church and State in a process which allows the possibility of waves of re-Christianisation. As such, secularisation is achieved via various routes and at different rates depending on the prevailing social-economic and political order of each nation. For Martin, the two most determinant variables in the process of secularisation are a), the degree of religious pluralism and b), the degree of differentiation between religious and State institutions. Important for the study of church closures, Martin is one of the few theorists of secularisation for whom religious practice is an important indicator²²³.

²¹⁹ See Danièle Hervieu-Léger, « Productions religieuses de la modernité: les phénomènes du croire dans les sociétés modernes », in Brigitte Caulier (dir.), *Religion, sécularisation, modernité : les expériences francophones en Amérique du Nord*, Quebec City, Les Presses de l'Université Laval, 1996, p. 37.

²²⁰ *Idem.*, p. 38.

²²¹ See David Martin, *A General Theory of Secularization*, Oxford, Basil-Blackwell, 1978.

²²² Along three axes (religious culture, public ideologies, and regimes of *laïcité*) with each axis informed by a set of four or five indicators, i.e. for the axis, religious culture, he assesses 1. degree of religious pluralism, 2. anti-clericalism, 3. clerical status, 4. internal religious conservatism, 5. Intellectualism in religion. *Idem.*, p. 59.

²²³ The other main theorist being Bryan Wilson. See Olivier Tschannen, “The Secularization Paradigm: A Systematization”, *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 30(4), December 1991, p. 410-411.

Of specific interest for the questions addressed in this thesis is Martin's "Mixed" type of secularisation model. For Martin mixed societies, or "duopolies" are characterised by a majority-minority configuration representing, like Quebec in Canada, a 40/60 split between Catholics and Protestants. Other similar societies include the Netherlands and Switzerland. Upon industrialisation, these societies were marked by high rates of religious pluralism, low levels of anti-clericalism, high clerical statuses, high cultic participation high and low levels of internal religious conservatism, and high levels of intellectualism in religion among the elite. Politically, mixed societies had stable democracies, low levels of communist influence, left-wing Catholic political orientations, and a religiously toned civil religion. Structurally, mixed societies tended to retain a "Church-State nexus", a confessional school system, a "fairly religious" intelligentsia, and religion held considerable sway in politics²²⁴.

Based on this, Martin's typology accurately represents Quebec's empirical experience up to the late 1960s, when secularisation began to manifest in intellectual and political milieus. In a more recent analysis, Martin considers Quebec's post-Quiet Revolution reconfiguration. He explains that Catholic practice tends to be higher in Protestant countries, where Catholics form a minority, driven by the need to defend a subculture against an alien State dominated by Protestant elites. He explains that in these types of societies.

Catholics seek parity of esteem and may sometimes align themselves with other movements that seek to displace those elites. However, once that is achieved or is well in train, the religious bonds and boundaries that helped bring it about are more constricting than enabling. At that point it only needs a rupture somewhere in the

²²⁴ See David Martin, *Op. Cit.*, p. 59.

protective dyke of symbolic practices for major parts of the pressure behind the dyke to fall dramatically²²⁵.

Accordingly, Martin suggests that the Second Vatican Council's liturgical reforms ruptured that "dyke of symbolic practices"²²⁶ and that this rupture affected Catholicism in mixed societies more than it did English-speaking Catholics – addressed immediately below. Interestingly, given their pioneering closure experience, Martin points to the Netherlands as another mixed society which suffered the same crisis in religious practice and in vocations following Vatican II²²⁷. The distinguishing factor for both Quebec and the Netherlands from Anglosphere Catholic minorities is a territorial base which provided Quebeckers and the Dutch with the sense of a complete sub-society once Catholic elites achieved control over their regional states²²⁸.

In accordance with Lemieux's concept of Quebec's "cultural Catholicism", Martin writes that religion became "cultural colouring and ritual recollection rather than a militant practice"²²⁹, noting that Quebec's militancy shifted to the political realm²³⁰. Moreover, Martin points to the erection of a welfare state during the Quiet Revolution as a further erosion of the former configuration where the Church had been standing-in for a stateless nation. Though Martin does not explicitly formulate it as such, Quebec went from being a mixed society to a monopolistic society during these years, which, according to his model, greatly attenuates religious practice. But

²²⁵ See David Martin, "Canada in Comparative Perspective", in David Lyon & Marguerite Van Die (dirs.), *Rethinking Church, State and Modernity: Canada Between Europe and America*, Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 2000, p. 24-25.

²²⁶ For a Québécois historical perspective that draws the same conclusions, see Michael Gauvreau, *Op. Cit.*, p. 335.

²²⁷ *Idem.*, p. 25.

²²⁸ *Ibid.*

²²⁹ *Ibid.*

²³⁰ See also Yves Couture, *La Terre Promise : L'absolu politique dans le nationalisme québécois*, New York, Liber, 1995.

declining practice is not the only factor to consider with respect to the cultural effects of secularisation; attitudes matter too.

3. *Vicarious Religion: The British face of the Quebec Church.*

Vicarious religion, conceptualised by English sociologist Grace Davie to account for simultaneous high levels of support for the Anglican Church and extremely low rates of religious practice, posits that people in late modern Western European societies are not quite ready to wash their hands of religion even if it plays a minor role in their daily lives. She found that non-practising Anglicans supported minority practice of religion on their behalf so that the institution could be called upon in times of need.²³¹ While Quebec's Catholic Church might seem to be the institution which most distinguishes it from English Canada, it is in fact, perhaps, its most English social graft. Like the Anglican Church in England, the Roman Catholic Church plays a public role. In Quebec, historically, its ubiquity, civil privileges and functions, and role as national steward separate from, but close to, the State makes it much closer to the Anglican Church in England than to the Catholic Church in France. Quebeckers, like their English counterparts, distinguish between the political and doctrinal positions of their Church and the social role of their churches. Their dissent should not be taken for apathy, and their anti-clericalism should not be equated with an aversion to churches²³². Aside from the culturally incongruent doctrinal positions of the Church, church spaces and rituals continue²³³ to be called upon in Quebec and throughout Europe to administer rites of

²³¹ Davie, Grace, "From believing without belonging to vicarious religion", in Daniel V.A. Olson & Detlef Pollack (dirs.), *The Role of Religion in Modern Societies*, Milton Park, Routledge, 2008.

²³² Recall E.-Martin Meunier's article cited above « L'appartenance catholique québécois et son double », *Op. Cit.* which found Quebeckers hold strong religious views and high standards for religious practice (as opposed to politically instrumental views of religion such as those behind France's Catholic mobilisation against *mariage pour tous* in 2013, see Céline Béraud & Philippe Portier, *Op. Cit.*

²³³ Or at least they continued to when I started this project. Compared to 2005 when per cent of infants were baptised, current infant baptismal rates of 15-20 per cent suggest the eclipse of churches' vicarious religion function. See Mathieu Perreault, « La (suprenante) hausse des baptêmes chez les adultes », *La Presse*, February 9, 2025,

passage²³⁴. Davie examines this type of paradoxical configuration, beginning with the phenomenon of “un-churched believers”, she observed in the 1990s, which she called “believing without belonging”²³⁵. Nearly two decades later, she adjusted the schema to that of “vicarious religion” to account for the continued public demand for established Churches. Davie explains the concept as “the notion of religion performed by an active minority but on behalf of a much larger number who (implicitly at least) not only understand, but quite clearly approve of what the minority is doing”²³⁶. Importantly, with respect to the problem proposed here, Davie argues that churches perform an essential role in vicariousness.

Though people do not attend them with regularity or even think of them often, Davie explains, they nevertheless “feel strongly about the church buildings present in their locality but only demonstrate their attachment when a building is threatened with closure”²³⁷. Her research indicates that Europeans view churches as public utilities, which ought to be maintained for the public good; that is both in terms of theology and to ritualise milestones, both individual and collective, as well as moments of joy and sorrow²³⁸. While acknowledging that vicarious religion can and often does operate on very limited resources, they do, as a type of cultural religion, require financial support from the non-practising public as part of the bargain²³⁹.

(web), consulted February 21, 2026, <https://www.lapresse.ca/actualites/2025-02-09/au-quebec/la-surprenante-hausse-des-baptemes-chez-les-adultes.php#:~:text=L'augmentation%20du%20nombre%20de%20bapt%C3%AAses%20adultes%20s'explique%20aussi,prot%C3%A9ger%20l'identit%C3%A9%20qu%C3%A9b%C3%A9coise.%20%C2%BB>.

²³⁴ Think for example of public mourning rituals for national heroes or following disasters like the recent conflagration in Lac-Mégantic.

²³⁵ Referring to widespread in religious beliefs and low levels of practice. See, Grace Davie, “Believing without belonging: is this the future of religion in Britain?”, *Social compass*, 37(4), 1990, p. 455-469.

²³⁶ See Grace Davie, “From believing without belonging to vicarious religion”, in Daniel V.A. Olson & Detlef Pollack (dirs.), *The Role of Religion in Modern Societies*, Milton Park, Routledge, 2008, p.169.

²³⁷ *Idem.*, p. 171.

²³⁸ Regarding Québec think, for example, of the papal visit of 1984 or the tragedy in Lac-Mégantic.

²³⁹ See Grace Davie, 2008, *Op. Cit.*, p. 173.

The Quebec State since 1995 has intervened to provide considerable support for churches. Since the creation of the Religious Heritage Council in 1995, all Quebec governments, *Libéral*, *Parti Québécois* and *Coalition avenir Québec* have notably supported religious heritage²⁴⁰. Despite the evidence suggesting the continued vitality of certain aspects of vicarious religion, expressed in Quebec as cultural Catholicism, an abundance of evidence nevertheless suggests that this configuration has been eclipsed²⁴¹. Moreover, it is not only ambient culture that distances itself from Catholicism and Catholic traditions; the Catholic Church itself, despite its supposed reconciliation with modernity following Vatican II, is pulling away from society in its prioritisation of the concept of Church-Institution over that of Church-People of God²⁴².

4. *Exculturation: breakdown of a 50-year socio-religious consensus.*

Exculturation could be seen as the polarisation of religious and popular culture. Meunier writes that this opposition accelerated

in the years following the Council... Faced with this opposition, many believers would diverge: some preferred to give the Pope and his followers all the authority they claimed; others went into exile far from the temple...²⁴³.

In the same vein, Hervieu-Léger proposes that the consequences of this double movement – the counter-culturalisation of religion and the evacuation of the sacred from popular culture, in concert with generalised individualisation, have led to an “institutional deregulation of belief”²⁴⁴. These conditions have ruptured traditional poles of religious identity: community solidarity vs. universal

²⁴⁰ The *Coalition avenir Québec* notably announced that if elected they would allocate \$25,000,000 additional funds during the 2018 provincial election. The Liberals employed the same strategy to bolster support during the summer of 2016, and the *Parti Québécois* did likewise in 2012.

²⁴¹ See E.-Martin Meunier, 2010 & 2015, *Op. Cit.*; Solange Lefebvre, (dir.), *Le Patrimoine religieux du Québec. Éducation et transmission du sens*, Quebec City, Les Presses de l'Université Laval, 2009.

²⁴² See E.-Martin Meunier, *Le Pari Personnaliste*, Montreal, Fides, 2007, p. 343.

²⁴³ *Ibid.*

²⁴⁴ See Danièle Hervieu-Léger, *Le Pèlerin et le converti : La religion en mouvement*, Paris, Flammarion, 1999, p. 28, original : « la dérégulation institutionnelle du croire ».

ethics, and erudite culture vs. authentic emotion; leading to autonomous, or unmoored, religious trajectories within Catholicism²⁴⁵. Evidence of this inability to balance these contradictory trajectories is the emergence of fringe groups, like the Society of Pope Pius X, the Neocatechumenal Way, and Taizé, among others. Thus, as it fragmented, the Church lost the ability

to maintain a balance between these two lines of flight, which correspond to two ways of 'leaving religion': through communal confinement on the one hand, and through ethical universalisation on the other²⁴⁶.

A consequence of this fragmentation, Hervieu-Léger writes, is that culture and religion, in historically Catholic societies such as France or Quebec, where Meunier maintains that Catholicism still furnishes the social imaginary²⁴⁷, begin to separate as they lose one another's moderating influence²⁴⁸. On the one hand, religion's symbolic repertoire is deregulated and recomposed to suit individual tastes as opposed to transmitting tradition. On the other hand, without the obligation to contain a dominant culture, the Church is free to entrench its authority on an increasingly limited number of militant followers²⁴⁹. So, as we see, exculturation is a process driven by the "social and cultural rejection of religious institutions and the loss of cultural control over the religious traditions they have managed to transmit for centuries"²⁵⁰. French political

²⁴⁵ *Idem.*, p.72-74.

²⁴⁶ *Idem.*, 1999, p. 82, original: « *maintenir l'équilibre entre ces deux lignes de fuite qui correspondent à deux modes de 'sortie de la religion': par enfermement communautaire d'une part, par universalisation éthique d'autre part* ».

²⁴⁷ See E.-Martin Meunier & Sarah Wilkins-Laflamme, « Sécularisation, Catholicisme et transformation du régime de religiosité au Québec. Étude comparative avec le Catholicisme au Canada (1968-2007) », *Recherches Sociographiques*, 52(3), 2011, p. 722. <https://www.erudit.org/fr/revues/rs/2011-v52-n3-rs5005802/1007655ar.pdf>, p. 689. <https://www.erudit.org/fr/revues/rs/2011-v52-n3-rs5005802/1007655ar.pdf>.

²⁴⁸ See Danièle Hervieu-Léger, 2003, *Op. Cit.*

²⁴⁹ Weekly cultic participation among Québécois in 2011 was 11.1 per cent depending on the diocese. See Sarah Wilkins-Laflamme, « Les Religions au Canada: bref portrait statistique », *Journal of Religion and Demography*, 7(1), December 2014, (web), consulted 13 January 13, 2019.

²⁵⁰ See Danièle Hervieu-Léger, 2003, *Op. Cit.*, p. 93. For more on religion as the inheritance of a tradition see Danièle Hervieu-Léger, *Religion as a Chain of Memory*, Simon Lee (translator), New Brunswick, New Jersey, Rutgers University Press, 2000, original: « *le mouvement de refoulement social et culturel des institutions*

scientist Olivier Roy elaborates on Hervieu-Léger's concept, which he reformulates, describing what is lost through exculturation, as the overlap between the cultural and religious spheres; the

transition between disbelief and the community of faith was, by definition, the space of religious culture (...) by tightening the criteria for belonging, religions are also contributing to this growing dichotomy, and to the disappearance of a secular religious culture ²⁵¹.

Left in the wake of this polarisation are Quebec's Catholic churches, as religion individualises and society secularises²⁵², on the one hand, and the clergy batten down the hatches of their intransigence to modern sensibilities on the other. As noted previously, some 650 out of 2,088 churches have closed already, and the trend shows no sign of retreat²⁵³. Take, for example, the Archdiocese of Quebec. In 2011 there were 216 parishes responsible for 255 churches, which were served by 175 priests. By 2020, the diocese reduced the number of parishes - already cut down to 64 in 2018 - to 37, roughly equivalent to the 42 priests currently serving the archdiocese²⁵⁴. With respect to churches, the clergy's demographic crisis is even more pressing than the problem of finances or the dearth of parishioners, which has radicalised the Church's rhythm of exculturation²⁵⁵. This is only accelerating if you consider how the Church is replacing leaders like priests with those from the Global South whose views often do not reflect those of French-Canadians or their theological traditions.

religieuses et celui de la perte d'emprise culturelle des traditions religieuses dont celles-ci ont géré pendant des siècles la transmission ».

²⁵¹ See Olivier Roy, *La sainte ignorance : le temps de la religion sans culture*, Paris, Éditions Seuil, 2007, original : « transition entre l'incroyance et la communauté de foi consistait, par définition l'espace de la culture religieuse (...) en resserrant les critères d'appartenance, les religions contribuent aussi à cette dichotomie croissante, et à cette disparition d'une culture religieuse profane ».

²⁵² In the sense of the declining plausibility of institutionalised religion.

²⁵³ See Annex I.

²⁵⁴ See « Depuis 2018, 64 paroisses au lieu de 130 au sein du Diocèse de Québec », Église catholique du Québec, January 18, 2018, (web), consulted 13 January 2019, <https://www.ecdq.org/depuis-2018-64-paroisses-au-lieu-de-130-au-sein-du-diocese-de-Québec/>.

²⁵⁵ See Fabien Venon, 2012, *Op. Cit.*, p. 55-71.

5. *Disaffiliation and the Rise of Religious Heritage*

Quebec has experienced sixty years of progressive institutional secularisation. In the 1960s, the Church lost control of its massive and all-encompassing network of social institutions, but roughly 80 per cent of Quebecers continued to attend Mass each Sunday. Then, in the decade between 1970 and 1980, intellectual discourse divided, with one current espousing if not outright anti-clericalism, at least contempt for Quebec's religious past and traditions, while the other current – less influentially – continued to insist upon religion's social role in Quebec from the cultural perspective. During that same decade, the number of Quebecers attending Sunday Mass declined by half²⁵⁶. In 1998, the clergy, via Montreal's General Synod of 1995-1998, officially gave up waiting for the flock to return²⁵⁷ and established a policy of church adaptation to circumstances based on fusions and church closures²⁵⁸. The Rubicon crossed, the Church became theologically more conservative over these decades, catering to its core clientele. During those same years, a renewed secularist movement successfully lobbied for the de-confessionalisation of the Nation's schools, halted the practice of automatic sacramental induction into the Church and finally ended Catholic religious education in 2008²⁵⁹. It is hard to emphasise this development too much. Since then, the question for youth is no longer even about disaffiliation, but full-throated alienation.

These recent developments have altered the dynamics of exculturation from one characterised by late-teenage or early adulthood disaffiliation to one which, as Canadian sociologists of religion Joel Thiessen and Sarah Wilkins-Laflamme suggest, is increasingly characterised by irreligious

²⁵⁶ See Raymond Lemieux, *Op. Cit.*, p.68.

²⁵⁷ Which they had done during the 1980s and 1990s via a system of financial redistribution between parishes. See Fabien Venon 2013, *Op. Cit.*

²⁵⁸ See Fabien Venon, 2012, *Op. Cit.*

²⁵⁹ See Claude Ryan, « Le Rapport Proulx et l'avenir de la dimension religieuse dans le système scolaire du Québec », *Revue générale de droit*, 30(2), 1999, p. 217-238.

socialisation. They describe the transforming process of exiting religion as having a snowball effect:

as irreligion grows, it becomes increasingly socially acceptable to be unaffiliated, and more individuals, in turn, become willing to adopt this stance toward religion. But most notably, as more and more children are born into families of religious nones, families who are either actively against religion or indifferent toward it, fewer and fewer children receive any religious socialisation during their formative years. Fewer set foot in a place of worship, even for special occasions, and less and less receive any form of religious education at home, at school, or elsewhere²⁶⁰.

Indeed, among high school and university students, religion in general is characterised as a cult in contrast with their worldviews and values.

In response, a veritable national social movement has emerged comprising the religious and secular spheres, employing conservationist outrage and expert opinion to save Quebec's church buildings. First, in the 1990s and 2000s, social scientists reconsidered Quebec's religious heritage, positively rehabilitating religion's legacy for Quebec. During the same years, art historians, ethnologists and urbanists began cataloguing that legacy judged to be on the path to extinction²⁶¹. Following the mass mediatisation of the conversion of Montreal's Saint-Jean-de-la-Croix into luxury condominiums in 2002, the public reaction against church privatisation established a grammar and repertoire, which have only gained their generalisation with each new headline and television broadcast featuring the closure of yet another church²⁶². It appears thus that there is a relationship between the process of exculturation of the socio-religious configuration of vicarious religion and the consequent patrimonialisation of religion in general, and established Church

²⁶⁰ See Joel Thiessen & Sarah Wilkins-Laflamme, "Becoming a Religious None: Irreligious Socialization and Disaffiliation", *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 56(1), 2017, p. 64-82.

²⁶¹ See Laurier Turgeon, 2005, *Op. Cit.*

²⁶² The experience in Quebec confirms Grace Davie's 2008 assertion that vicarious religion only becomes visible when churches are threatened. See, Grace Davie, 2008, *Op. Cit.* p. 171.

churches specifically.

6. *Social church closure: roles and relations.*

It is best to close here and define what is meant by “church closure” from a specifically social scientific perspective. Although the term refers to the legal and material processes of ceasing a church’s operations, here it is also understood as a social process driven by competition and conflict. Max Weber’s theory of social monopolisation as one of exclusion is central to the case of church closures in Quebec. His idea is that there is an ongoing competition for social dominance amongst groups who seek to achieve legitimacy for their authority through interrelated strategies of group identification, exclusion, and usurpation, which simultaneously harden and rupture social boundaries²⁶³. With respect to the problem of church closures’ local, regional, and national resonances, Weber’s theory illuminates the process of group formation between practising and non-practising Catholics, institutional and grassroots civil society, and open and strict secularist politicians whose competing ambitions for Quebec’s religious heritage are often incompatible. His conceptualisation of social closure sheds light on the process involved in how church closures can unleash a process which is no less than the struggle by rival factions to control the sacred social reference once performed by Quebec’s national Roman Catholic Church, a conflict that the Church is either no longer willing or able to contain. In the resulting state of anarchy, each group wields its weapon of choice: inherited identity, professional accreditation, local prestige, office, pocketbook, pen, or piety.

In the case of church closures in Quebec, we see the transformation of a national public Church to

²⁶³ See Max Weber, “Economy and Society”, in Guenther Roth & Claus Wittich (translators & dirs.), *Economy and society: An outline of interpretive sociology*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1978, [1922]. p. 342.

that of a denomination like any other, subject only to its own dogma and responsible only to those who adhere to it. What is at stake is the struggle to control how or even if the fragmented pieces of the sacred social, or national reference should or can be preserved. It is a struggle at once symbolic and material.

In the case of social church closure, the battleground for symbolic usurpation begins with a weakened clergy who once enjoyed monopolisation of the social sacred in its classical modern expression: obligatory and collective religious practice, which was territorially fixed and repetitive. In subsequent waves of church closure, and as the clergy attempted to strengthen itself by closing and selling churches in order to support a denominational and entrenched Catholicism whose adherents were more committed to their religious authority, politicians, professional groups such as architects and urbanists, as well as academic disciplines such as History and the Arts employed, usurpation practices “to bite into the advantages of higher groups [the clergy] with the exclusion of lower groups that are even weaker [average cultural Catholics], whose response is often manifested by grassroots organising as opposed to institutional credentials²⁶⁴. Ironically, closures as episodes for competition over the spoils of a dismantled public Church create moments, likely final instances, of recomposition where secularised elements of society – primarily politics, law, and civil society, but also the economy and, of course, religion - are, for a dramatic discursive moment, dragged back into the historical orbit of the Church via the unavoidable impact of closure events, which present a powerful example of what Marcel Mauss describes as a “total social fact”:

These phenomena are at once legal, economic, religious, aesthetic, morphological and so on. They are legal in that they concern individual and collective rights, organised and diffuse morality; they may be entirely obligatory, or subject simply to praise or disapproval. They are at once political and

²⁶⁴ See Frank Parkin, *Marxism and Class Theory: A Bourgeois Critique*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1979.p. 45.

domestic, being of interest, both to classes and to clans and families. They concern religious mentality. They are economic, for the notions of value, utility, interest, luxury, wealth, acquisition, accumulation, and consumption²⁶⁵.

The articulation of these theoretical approaches helped to make visible the largely opaque dimensions of church closures and is vital to helping to answer the questions of who participates in church closure and why? What motives do they pursue and how do they understand events and their place in them? How do competing discourses affect conflictual closures and how does their availability impact wider trends of social polarisation? Lastly, what are the religious dimensions of these interactions and what do they reveal about patterns of, and attitudes towards, contemporary sociocultural change?

F. Methodology

The methodology used to conduct my research was a straightforward classical (1915-1945) Chicago School approach characterised by observational field work, interviews which included personal life histories and demographic data, all focused on producing a detailed empirical typological portrait of localised real-world conditions of an ethnic community²⁶⁶ negotiating the travails of an ever-evolving modernity. Robert Erza Park was first a journalist before becoming a sociologist.²⁶⁷ Following his example, I wanted to embody, in this thesis, his ideal definition of the sociologist, a more focused reporter who had to report, a little more accurately, and a little more dispassionately than the average greenhorn, what Franklin Ford called the Big News. Big News was the long-term trends that recorded what was actually happening rather than what, on the

²⁶⁵ See Marcel Mauss, *The Gift: The Form and Functions of Exchange in Archaic Societies*. London, Cohen & West, 1966, p. 76-77.

²⁶⁶ All participants agreed to their names being used after reading and signing a contentment form.

²⁶⁷ After my master's in Canadian studies, I worked two years as Journalist for many Regional Newspapers in Canada.

surface, simply appeared to be happening”²⁶⁸ This methodology, consecrated in Quebec ethnological studies devoted to the passage from traditional to modern society by Everett Hughes²⁶⁹ during the 1940s, helps us to address the questions this research seeks to address. By grounding my questioning in fieldwork, having formally interviewed 60 key actors in church closure. Each interview lasted between 30 minutes and 3 hours. It is also important to note that I met with these individuals on several occasions. The more I learned about the situation, the more I returned to meet with them to ask more detailed questions about the issues surrounding the closure. I have also informally interacted with several hundred others, in a variety of settings, I am confident that the conclusions drawn in the pages that follow adequately reflect the dynamics of cultural change presently underway. These social mutations revolve around the questions of what Catholic church closures indicate about the relationships between the simultaneous processes of religious heritage construction and the growing distance between religion and culture, as well as the dynamic between these socio-historic processes and the privatisation of public religions in societies with historically established Churches.

1. Research Subject: Church Closure

This research examines the relationship between, and significance of, competing patrimonialisations of Quebec Churches and views these as various responses to the Church’s abdication of its national role, in the context of rapid social and cultural transformation. Following a cultural sociological approach focused on meaning-making, the methodology used was initially inspired by Jeffrey C. Alexander’s concept of “cultural performance”, which uses the methods of “cultural pragmatics”²⁷⁰ to examine both meaning and power. Alexander defines social

²⁶⁸ Robert Ezra Park, "An Autobiographical Note", in *Collected Papers, I. Race and Culture*. Edited by Everett Cherrington Hughes et al. Glencoe, Ill., The Free Press, 1950; p. IX.

²⁶⁹ See Everett Hughes, *French Canada in Transition*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1945.

²⁷⁰ See Jeffrey C. Alexander, *Performance and Power*, Cambridge, Polity Press, 2011.

performances as the “social process by which actors, individually or in concert, display for others the meaning of their social situation”, or social dramas²⁷¹; in which

actors present themselves as being motivated by and toward existential, emotional, and moral concerns, the meanings of which are defined by patterns of signifiers whose referents are the social, physical, natural, and cosmological worlds within which actors and audiences live”²⁷²;

put otherwise, culture. Alexander’s conception of a social drama helps one to appreciate that social closure of churches is not just about the power to plunder material or symbolic advantages made available by church closures, but also produces meaning: about community, identity, religious belief, historical narratives of cultural change, as well as relationships across generations and space. Social closure within Catholic churches in Quebec is dramatic and a dramaturgical perspective is a useful lens to make sense of the conflict which engenders it.

Applied to the problem of social closure of churches in Quebec, this approach helped to identify social actors participating in church closures and systemically collect, examine and analyse the social scripts they employ to make sense of their role²⁷³ in the social closure of their churches and the wider social drama of exculturation of a national public religion. Social closure is not vaudeville; rather, it is an empirical nationwide reckoning with the fragmentation of Quebec’s repositories of what Emile Durkheim conceptualised as the social sacred, which he defines as:

a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and forbidden beliefs and practices, which unite into a single moral community called a Church, all those who adhere to them²⁷⁴.

²⁷¹ *Idem*, p. 28

²⁷² *Idem.*, p. 29.

²⁷³ The research proposed here situates itself within sociology’s long tradition of “role theory” developed for example by George H. Mead, Robert K. Merton, and Erving Goffman as well as Pierre Bourdieu.

²⁷⁴ See Emile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, Translated by Joseph Ward Swain, 1954, p. 47.

Participating in church closure is unpleasant. Some participants have devoted up to a decade of their lives defending their conception of the social sacred for the very reason that it is a powerful motivator. Inserting myself as a researcher into such highly charged contexts, then interpreting them, has been a delicate operation undertaken with the greatest respect for all parties.

2. *Textual Research: Media and Archival Analysis*

A considerable amount of preparatory work had to be carried out to identify the scale and historical periodisation of the phenomenon²⁷⁵. Given that neither the Church nor the State maintains a publicly available inventory of specifically Catholic church closures, the first task was to compile a list of church closures in Quebec since the Quiet Revolution began in 1960. To do this, an extensive media analysis was carried out which analysed all Quebec newspapers using online databases. The inventory includes the name of each parish, the date of its canonic erection as well as the year the church was constructed, when it was fused and closed, and what became of it. Next, based on an analysis of press coverage, churches were classed, based on the community's response to the closure, as either a), consensual (characterised by a rapid conversion supported by the community), b), conflictual (characterised by public opposition) and c), indifference (characterised by prolonged vacancy and community apathy). By analysing the data from my inventory, it was possible to select exemplary cases across the nearly three decades of closures that have occurred since Montreal's Archdiocesan Synod established the contemporary church closure paradigm in 1998²⁷⁶.

²⁷⁵ See Annex I.

²⁷⁶ See Fabien Venon, 2012, *Op. Cit.*

As mass mediatisation of church closures helped to frame the opposition to church privatisations among the public, the practices and regulations governing church closures and transformations changed considerably over twenty years²⁷⁷. To reflect this, three periods were identified based on the migration of influence over church closures from one group to another along with their different interpretations of “religious heritage”. The schema identified by analysing the inventory data is that generally influence over the control of religious heritage migrated from the diocese to the Nation and finally to local communities. Accordingly, the periods are a), 1998-2004 (the clerical moment), b), 2005-2011 (the National moment) and c), 2012 present (the community moment). By analysing the types of responses to church closures across these three periods, it is possible to observe a dialectic between Quebeckers’ symbolic response to church closures through media reception and the pragmatic regulatory regimes established to limit some kinds of closures and transformations, to encourage others, or even prevent them altogether. Rates of indifference declined from 1998 to present, while consensual and conflictual responses increased. An initial hypothesis was that this represents a growing awareness of the possible repertoire of action of what might constitute a social movement against Church privatisation²⁷⁸. Out of the 650 church closures documented in the inventory, only 47 were conflictual, but I would argue that their sources of conflict are representative of low-burning tensions that failed to erupt elsewhere.

3. *Media Content Analysis*

This preparatory work was necessary to select exemplary cases. All poles can be coloured by religiosity in various ways. Consensual closures often mean sharing the church between

²⁷⁷ Most notably, the National Assembly held two series of nationwide public consultations which catalyzed two bursts of policy development respecting religious heritage. The first took place between 2005-2006 and the second was held in 2011. These are used to demarcate periods because discourse and practices noticeably shifted as a result.

²⁷⁸ See Charles Tilly, “From interactions to outcomes in social movements”, *How Social Movements Matter*, 10, 1999, 253-270.

community and religious functions. Indifferent closures could be accepted with genuinely religious motives in that parishioners might support the hierarchy's strategy of divesting buildings and investing in evangelisation, and conflictual closures could be characterised by the clash of these two poles. However, it is difficult to gauge motives for church-closure participation without interviewing actors. The objective was to examine the widest types of cases across the three periods, which exemplify the contemporary wave of church closure conditions, especially those which garnered the most media attention and inspired the most concerted social response. This meant making the pragmatic and theoretical decision to select cases from the conflictual closure category even though it represents the smallest proportion of cases. Pragmatically, from a discursive perspective, conflictual cases naturally dominate media attention and attract the greatest range of social actors. Theoretically, conflictual cases best exemplify the social formations which have emerged in the social closure of a public religion in that the conflict makes them visible and associates their positions and roles with real people who can be studied. As such, from the 47 conflictual cases, eight were selected based on their ability to evoke the relationship between socio-religious conditions and which can shed light on the dimensions of social closure, which, to lesser or greater degrees, it is anticipated, are present in all church closures of public religions²⁷⁹.

I decided to pursue conflictual cases based on my hypothesis that consensual responses indicate church communities, which have remained in the vicarious religion configuration, while indifferent responses might suggest an already ex-cultured configuration²⁸⁰, and that conflictual responses are in transition between both poles. This type of response is most interesting for

²⁷⁹ See Annex I, Conditions such as regional and institutional representation; types of church communities; critiques of church closure strategies, repertoires of action, and modalities of transformations.

²⁸⁰ The concept, developed by Danièle Hervieu-Léger, refers to the mutual exclusion of dominant and religious culture, see Danièle Hervieu-Léger, *Catholicisme, la fin d'un monde*, Paris, Bayard, 2003.

research aimed at examining the process of reconfiguration of a vicarious religion²⁸¹ into something new. It is this confrontation which offers the sociology of religion-rich ground for examining the process of socio-religious change because actors solicit more discourses, wield them more forcefully, and are forced to engage with their positions more fully than the other two types of responses²⁸². Accordingly, the cases selected are Saint-Germain-de-Rimouski (2014-2024), Saint-Jean-Baptiste (2015-2024), and Saint-Edmond-de-Grantham, 2011-2019. They offered the best range of dimensions. Conflictual cases challenge the *status quo* of how the phenomenon is managed. Together the three cases selected challenge early wild west orthodoxy by narrowing the clergy's room for manoeuvre, by establishing national political precedents, and by responsabilising citizens to protect lightning rods of their rooted identities despite seemingly hopeless odds. While all three dimensions are present in each case, Rimouski is exemplary of the popular reorientation of clerical assumptions. Saint-Jean-Baptiste has been the source of national bureaucratic changes to the way religious heritage is managed. For its part, Saint-Edmond-de-Grantham demonstrated the capacity for tradition to confront modernity.

4. Key Interviews

Following the comprehensive media analysis undertaken for each church, every person featured in the media's coverage was noted and grouped based on their social provenance, i.e. religion, civil society, or politics. Despite the variety of circumstances in which each closure took place, the groups involved in church closure participants were stable.

²⁸¹ The term, coined by Grace Davie, refers to a socioreligious configuration where a believing, but non-practising majority depend on a practising minority to maintain a religious infrastructure which can be called upon in times of need, see Davie, Grace, "From believing without belonging to vicarious religion", in Daniel V.A. Olson & Detlef Pollack (dirs.), *The Role of Religion in Modern Societies*, 2008, p. 169.

Out of these three domains emerge six social groups whose members largely share their orientation to religion, religious heritage and religion's contemporary public role. From religion we see two orientations: 1), Modernist Catholics, those represented by clergy, and very large swathes of those who regularly practise for whom post-Vatican II pastoral orientations trump aesthetic religious considerations; and 2), Traditionalist Catholics who often choose to practise at historical churches instead of their territorially designated parish for aesthetic, family history, and liturgical reasons. From civil society emerge two typical orientations: institutional civil society, composed of cultural "elites", which contrasts with the more populist grassroots civil society, strongly influenced by the cultural Catholic socio-religious configuration. Thus, 3), Institutional Civil Society actors enjoy established prestige derived from professional occupations in the cultural sphere, operate bureaucratically and often collaborate in closure as consultants for modernist Catholics and governments. 4.) Grassroots Civil Society actors tend to be older and belong more to the entrepreneurial and technical class. For them religion is a question of identities and a source of pride and distinction. Just as they are defensive of their identities, they are sensitive to elitist slights like those from the Church, governments, and institutional civil society. They organise in *ad hoc* communities in reaction to church closure and share aesthetic and religious sensibilities with their Traditionalist Catholic counterparts. Lastly, from the political domain, we likewise see two tendencies: strict and secularist politicians, who similarly polarise over the question of church closure. 5), Strict Secularist Politicians participate in church closures reluctantly. While they do not necessarily oppose religion, they unapologetically reject government cooperation with the Church to maintain religious heritage and view the two institutions' roles in society as mutually exclusive. Strict secularist politicians are generally younger than their open secularist counterparts and they view contemporary Catholicism as but one among many religious communities. Finally,

6), Open Secularist Politicians seek to avoid demolition of old and rare religious heritage and are willing to use their political capital to prevent it. They take the pragmatic view that they share their constituents with the Church and, therefore, ought to cooperate when challenges present themselves. This type views religion and politics as complementary as opposed to mutually exclusive. Open secularism politicians, much like Cultural Catholics, conceive of religious heritage as an identity resource as well as a marker of social space for the francophone majority with whom it resonates most strongly.

The identification of these six types took place over the course of four years (2017-2021) of preparatory study in an iterative process and assumed form only after interviewing every willing participant, some 60 people all told, 28 were transcribed formally and used in this text, who emerged from earlier media and archival analyses. My goal going into the interviews was to historically reconstitute the closures and to establish patterns of motivation, relationality and worldview. To do that, I pursued three broad lines of questioning, namely participants' a), motivation to participate; b), interpretations of what constitutes religious heritage; and c), connection between local and global closure (how their experience of church closure connects to the National experience of Church closure). These are addressed in the second chapter for each of the cases, the first being dedicated to media and archival descriptions. I stayed in each community for a week each, lived amongst them, in their religious institutions and rectories, and they helped me commute from one interview to the next. Spontaneously, I shared dinner, drinks, tea and local colour with them. Many took me on short road trips to better understand their local contexts. I climbed church steeples to see bells, played organs, and experienced personal tensions firsthand with tact and neutrality. I maintained contact with many of these participants for five years, as they

sent me updates. I likewise sent key actors copies of their respective chapters and made the necessary adjustments for accuracy and developments in each case.

G. Limitations:

The objective of this research is to identify stable social patterns of church closure and to examine how variable contexts influence these dynamics within a single national culture. Initial intrigue into the seeming dissonance between the increasingly strident secularist discourse fuelled by the Reasonable Accommodation Crisis from 2006 to 2008, followed by the proposed Charter of Values in 2013 on the one hand, and the likewise accelerating State-funded support for the preservation and promotion of religious heritage on the other during the same period, began a period of inquiry, which coincided with an unprecedented wave of Catholic church closures across Quebec. As previously noted, these factors raised questions about the relationship between francophone Québécois, religion, and religious heritage. As an Ontarian, where there had been limited numbers of closures by 2014, I had fodder for comparison. For example, closures in English-speaking, religiously plural Ontario simply did not make such a significant impact in the public sphere. I wanted to find out why, in Quebec, so many more churches were closing, why their closures resonated so strongly, and what this meant for cultural change in that society. Quebec's Catholic churches presented an ideal sociological subject for several reasons: demographically, most parts of Quebec are still religiously homogenous. Their ubiquitous social presence offers an immense possibility for global interpretation, as well as their central role in culture and history as objects and motors of social change. I thought that this offered ideal sociological conditions to investigate wider trends of socio-religious change underway across Western Civilisation.

Of course, curiosity tends to be grandiose. To at least begin to pursue my questioning, I believed that the monographic method of speaking to people involved in specific instances of church closure, asking them about their motivations to participate, examine the various capacities in which they acted, and the sense they made of events, considered in the specificity of different social contexts, could offer some early clues about what this next stage of secularisation might look like and mean. This approach entails certain limitations.

First, as a doctoral student, working alone, my scope had to be limited. I initially identified eight churches, which would have greatly increased the range of social contexts and actors²⁸³. I carried out field work in Rimouski, Quebec City, Saint-Edmond-de-Grantham, and Montreal throughout 2020. Following the fourth episode of fieldwork, dedicated to the fascinating case of Très-Saint-Nom-de-Jésus, I recognised that completing eight cases was unfeasible. In fact, as I was transcribing and drafting the first three cases, it became obvious that even including the fourth case in my dissertation would be beyond the scope of the format if I were to achieve the exhaustivity required for the minute social study of church closure. Thus, my questions could only be addressed to the three societies I studied. 1), a medium-sized Catholic institutional centre with high-degree of affinity with the ecclesiastical structure and religious homogeneity: Rimouski; 2), an historic and national capital where religious heritage plays an important cultural role, less religiously homogenous, less practising and responsible for an immense legacy, thus facing a severe crisis added to its precedent setting capacity of how to manage religious infrastructure: Quebec City; and 3), A small agricultural village experiencing the transition from a traditional to modern social configuration: Saint-Edmond-de-Grantham. The Montreal case will be addressed in a forthcoming

²⁸³ Saint-Jean-de-la-Croix, Montréal, 2001; Notre-Dame-de-Fatima, Jonquière, 2004; Notre-Dame-de-l'Assomption, Sherbrooke, 2006; Saint-Pierre-l'Apôtre, Saint-Jean-Longueuil, 2008; Très-Saint-Nom-de-Jésus, Montréal, 2009; Saint-Édmond-de-Grantham, Saint-Édmond-de-Grantham, 2011-2017; Saint-Jean-Baptiste, Québec, 2016; Cathédrale Sainte-Germaine, Rimouski, 2017.

article. Second, my research is limited to conflictual cases and does not reflect the majority of Quebec Church closures, which unfold in a largely consensual or indifferent manner. That is to say that most communities agree that a transformation project where the church remains open to the public and is retained as a collective good is preferable to those where they become private spaces or disappear, but that closure must proceed in either case, but the relationship between conflictual and other types of closure will be explored. In instances where privatisation is the result, again, most communities regrettably accept reality, even though both outcomes always generate a public response. A more thorough study of these cases is important, but outside of the scope of this thesis. Third, as a qualitative researcher, I am dependent on actors' consent to participate. In every case, important perspectives of those who actively supported closures were not possible to obtain via interviews, although their positions were included in the media analysis and archival-based chapters. This thesis would have been greatly enhanced with the inclusion of their perspectives as interview subjects. Fourth, as a meso-level interpretation, there is a limitation of what can be generalised on a national level. To address my desire to include a national interpretation, I made sure to solicit one from everyone based on their own perspective and to generalise as much as possible within those constraints.

Taking these constraints into consideration, I think it is possible to at least begin to answer the question: What does the social resistance to church closures between 1998 and 2025 indicate about the relationships between the simultaneous processes of religious heritage construction and exculturation and what can they reveal about the privatisation of public religions in societies with historically established Churches. Moreover, I am confident that at least attempting to answer this question is of the utmost importance at this moment when one quarter of Quebec's Catholic churches have already closed in the most haphazard of fashions. The cases included in this research

will show the disastrous potential for social harm when church closures go wrong in Quebec. Not only do bad closures mine the credibility of the already fragile institution that is the Catholic Church in Quebec, but they can pit well meaning, publicly oriented people against one another, not to mention lead to intergenerational conflict, which can only further undermine the material and immaterial transmission of Quebec's undeniably significant religious heritage.

III. Case One, Description of Cathedral Saint-Germain of Rimouski

A. Introduction: exemplarity in singularity



Figure 1 Saint-Germain-de-Rimouski

Rimouski offers a singular example of church closure²⁸⁴. Never has a Catholic bishop sought to desacralise his own cathedral until Mgr. Denis Grondin, archbishop of Rimouski. Not since the *Rouges*²⁸⁵ have Catholics so vehemently and directly challenged the authority of their archbishop. Rarely has “*l’esprit de*

clocher”²⁸⁶ socially divided a community to an equivalent degree as it has the former parishes of Rimouski, all of which face an existential dilemma, which pits their survival against that of the city’s mother church, finished in 1862. This saga is peppered with threats, courtroom dramas and insurrection, elements not generally associated with the orthodox narrative of Quebeckers’ religious indifference and the perceived social irrelevance of clergy.

Participants interviewed have variously described the cathedral’s closure as scandalous, disgraceful, tragic, and senseless. Meanwhile, nearly all participants simultaneously held the view that the debate concerning the cathedral offers insights for the future, whether as an opportunity to affirm deeply held convictions of identity and generational responsibility by resisting desacralisation or by embracing change to breathe new, secular life into an underused building

²⁸⁴ For a condensed version of this article see my article, Ryan Lux, “A Cathedral Too Far: Testing the limits of Catholic church closure in Québec”, *Studies in Religion/Sciences Religieuses*, Spring 2025, <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/00084298251314745>.

²⁸⁵ A Liberal French-Canadian political faction in the United Parliament of Canada which criticised ecclesiastic power.

²⁸⁶ Literally ‘spirit of the steeple’, but closer to neighbourhood spirit in English, in the sense of rivalry and pride.

with the view of preserving at least a trace of an eclipsed social order which might reach a wider and more diverse constituency than it could as a primarily religious institution. These two orientations, pro-closure and transformative, on the one hand, and anti-closure and conservative on the other, are multifaceted and inflected by the position and perspective of the actor. Even though both a politician and a priest may support turning a church into a condo tower, it does not mean they do so for the same reasons. However, he still might have more in common with the pro-closure politician than he does his fellow clergyman when it comes to the cathedral. The question of the cathedral tore the religious, civil society, and political spheres apart in Rimouski, which recomposed according to positions on the cathedral, forming *ad hoc* factions and pragmatic alliances of local leaders of each domain.

While their different visions of the cathedral's future have been deeply conflictual, it is important to also consider that scandals can only occur where a significant degree of people share values (in this instance the cathedral's patrimonial value) and secondly, scandals afford the opportunity to assess the salience of values and cost of their transgression. Dozens of religious, political, artistic, intellectual, and business elites held forth in the local and national media to discuss the fate of their cathedral, an engagement for some that has lasted for years. For the sociology of religions, their interventions and groupings present fertile soil for analysis and access to intimate worldviews, which might never have been expressed in mundane circumstances.

Catholicism in Rimouski is almost empirically synonymous with citizenship; nearly every voter is a baptised Catholic. As such, the infrastructural division between Church and State is somewhat artificial when it comes to how to finance religious heritage, especially after the city's nine parishes were fused in 2007. For the first time, the political and religious boundaries were coextensive linking the destinies of each neighbourhood in an unprecedented manner, confounding different

expressions of religion, class, and political outlook. But, despite near-religious uniformity, ‘Church’ had multiple meanings for Rimouskois: for some it is a symbol; for others it is practice. Some understand their church as an intimate community of practitioners; for others, the Church is a national ecclesiastical utility bought and paid for by previous generations, seen as a birthright and held in public trust by clergy. For others still, churches are increasingly viewed as an infrastructural burden – an irrational relic of an earlier time, which must either radically change to provide social utility or disappear.

The fact that, in Rimouski, each vision of Church and churches has roused such pitched and committed advocates across a decade testifies to the central place religion, or at least its memory, continues to occupy in its public imagination. This chapter will describe the circumstances of Saint-Germain Cathedral’s closure as reported by the media and the courts. A second chapter will analyse how nine key actors understand the conflict over Rimouski’s steeples and draw conclusions about the epic scandal’s significance for both the sociology of religions and the sociology of cultural change in Quebec.

This chapter will be divided into four sections, each representing a thematic period of Rimouski’s Saint-Germain’s cathedral scandal. These are 1), Before November 28, 2014: pre-closure and institutional reorganisation; 2), November 28, 2014 – December 31, 2016: the rise and fall of the Cathedral 1862 Committee; 3), January 1, 2017 – April 19, 2018: Public consultations and Parish Council takeover; 4), April 20, 2018 – May 1, 2020: Archdiocesan intransigence. Together these four periods cover the time leading up to and following the cathedral’s closure, to the week in February 2020 during which interviews were conducted in Rimouski with key actors. Throughout the chapter special attention is paid to introducing these key actors as they appear as the story unfolds by presenting their presence in the media coverage of the scandal.

B. 1967 – November 27, 2014: Renovations, heritage status and closure.

1. *Heritage Status Machinations: 1967-2005*

One of the most crucial pre-closure events was the 1967 renovations. In his 2016 chapter on the cathedral, Rimouski architect Michel L. Saint-Pierre notes two precipitating reasons: the new liturgy born out of the Second Vatican Council as well as skyrocketing insurance costs, which could be reduced by replacing wooden floors with concrete and overhauling the electrical and heating systems²⁸⁷. With respect to adapting to the new liturgy, the architect Firmin Lepage returned the cathedral to its original neo-gothic simplicity by removing the master altar, neo-baroque decoration, and galleries; replacing pews and woodwork with modernist furnishings, as well as moving the Casavant organ from the back of the nave to the front of the cathedral behind the new congregation-facing granite altar. As Saint-Pierre explains in his chapter, reaction to the work was mixed, citing contemporary media reactions, which reported, “with the work completed, the cathedral provokes the most diverse remarks, the most contrasted appreciations”²⁸⁸.

This ambivalence was long-lasting, according to religious heritage expert Luc Noppen. He explained to me in an interview that Rimouskois indifferently received the news that their cathedral had received a heritage evaluation of D, or medium, from the Quebec Council of Religious Heritage, which cited the 1967 modernist renovations as the primary reason for its disqualification from important State subsidies distributed by the council²⁸⁹. Moreover, he adds that this assessment was welcomed positively by the clergy, whose interests it served by facilitating an eventual sale

²⁸⁷ See Michel L. Saint-Pierre, « L’apport des travaux de 1967 à l’architecture de la cathédrale Saint-Germain », in Jean-René Thuot, Kurt Vignola and Nicolas (dirs.), *La cathédrale de Rimouski : Parcours, mémoires, récits*, Beaudry, L’Estuaire, 2016, p. 172.

²⁸⁸ * All translations by Ryan Lux, *Idem*, p. 174, original: « la fin des travaux, la cathédrale provoque les remarques les plus diverses, les appréciations les plus contrastées », and Lisette Morin « ‘Parée’ pour un autre siècle », *Le Progrès du Golfe*, Rimouski, December 14, 1967, p.3.

²⁸⁹ See interview with Luc Noppen by Ryan Lux, October 23, 2020, 10:00 mins, original: « C’était une manipulation totale de la logique patrimoniale. Mais le patrimoine n’a jamais été une priorité à Rimouski ».

of the cathedral at best, or at worst, a transformation, allowing the Parish Council to avoid paying for its maintenance²⁹⁰. Noppen's perspective is further supported by the Hansard transcripts of the Culture Commission and their public hearings on Quebec's religious heritage held in 2005 and 2006, which heard the testimony of the Archdiocese of Rimouski's treasurer, Michel Lavoie, who told commissioners that public attachment to rural churches is strikingly different from their urban counterparts. His testimony reflected the Archdiocese's long-held strategy to one day free itself of the cathedral and to concentrate its operations elsewhere. Lavoie testified that in Rimouski "the feeling of belonging to a parish is less strong than it used to be. One can easily move from Saint-Germain to Saint-Pie-X, Saint-Robert, and so on. So, people are more flexible than they were a few years ago"²⁹¹.

Lavoie had been an influential figure with the Quebec Religious Heritage Council for nearly two decades and helped to determine the heritage status criteria used to decide which churches could obtain subsidy status and which would not. First named president of the Lower Saint Lawrence roundtable on religious heritage in 2003, Lavoie would hold the position until 2016 and continue to sit on the table until at least 2020²⁹². In June 2005 he was elected to the council's executive, where he would sit until 2016 and act as president between 2007 and 2012²⁹³. During his time with the council, the arm's-length multi-confessional (overwhelmingly Catholic) body was responsible for distributing some \$500 million for church repair and maintenance, not a cent of which flowed

²⁹⁰ See Luc Noppen, « Essai sur la patrimonialité de la cathédrale Saint-Germain de Rimouski », in Jean-René Thuot, Kurt Vignola and Nicolas Beaudry (dirs.), *La cathédrale de Rimouski : Parcours, mémoires, récits*, L'Estuaire, 2016, p. 369.

²⁹¹ See Quebec, Assemblée Nationale, Commission de la culture, 37^e législature, 1^{re} session, 38(59), November 3, 2005, original: « *le sentiment d'appartenance à une paroisse est moins fort qu'il l'était antérieurement. On peut facilement passer de Saint-Germain, aller à Saint-Pie-X, Saint-Robert, et ainsi suite. Donc, les gens sont plus flexibles qu'ils étaient il y a quelques années* ».

²⁹² See Conseil du patrimoine religieux du Québec, Rapport Annuel 2020-2021, 2021, p. 4

²⁹³ See Conseil du patrimoine religieux du Québec, rapports annuels, 2003-2020, available online : <https://www.patrimoine-religieux.qc.ca/fr/publications/rapport-annuel>.

to the cathedral of his own diocese, though Saint-Pie-X²⁹⁴ received more than \$300,000 alone in 2020²⁹⁵.

2. *Parish Fusions: 2004-2006*

Returning to 2004, in September of that year Archbishop Mgr. Bertrand Blanchet formed a committee to analyse the conditions of Rimouski's nine parishes, tasked them with holding public consultations and to present him with recommendations of how best to rationalise pastoral and financial resources on the territory of the city of 45,000 residents, 95 per cent of whom are baptised Catholics²⁹⁶. In November 2005, the committee submitted its report, which recommended creating three parishes, each containing three local communities (former parish churches). In conjunction with the committee's deliberations, Mgr. Blanchet personally visited each of the city's nine parishes to meet parishioners and hear their views. On the 25th of April 2007, the archbishop presented his decision to the diocese, which was to annex eight of the city's parishes to Rimouski's original parish of Saint-Germain, served by one pastoral team, managed by one Parish Council but which would allow some degree of autonomous identities for the six remaining churches²⁹⁷. In the three-parish scenario, the committee recommended to Mgr. Blanchet, the community groupings, would select for themselves which church they would keep. Mgr. Blanchet, however, opted for one parish and to choose the closures himself, lest he run the risk of unleashing an internecine battle between communities. Concluding the press conference, Mgr. Blanchet acknowledged the disappointment and pain his decision would bring Rimouskois saying, "[e]very human existence

²⁹⁴ Built between 1964 and 1965 and granted a heritage grade of A or excellent.

²⁹⁵ See Gilles Turmel, « Rénovations majeures pour une église de Rimouski », *Le Journal de Québec*, May 29, 2020, (web), consulted May 5, 2021, journaldeQuebec.com/2020/05/29/renovations-majeures-pour-une-eglise-de-rimouski-1.

²⁹⁶ See Canadian Conference of Bishops, *Canadian Catholic Church Directory*, Ottawa: Novalis, 2006-2021.

²⁹⁷ Mgr. Bertrand Blanchet, « Réaménagements du secteur pastoral de Rimouski », conférence de presse, Archevêché de Rimouski, April 25, 2006, (web), consulted May 5, 2020, <http://www.paroissebet.ca/pdf/ream-riki-07-04.pdf>

is confronted, one day or another, with loss and bereavement. Experience shows that it is often possible to turn losses into gains.”²⁹⁸ His decision came into effect by episcopal decree on September 1, 2007.

Jean-Charles Lechasseur, 64-years-old in 2020 when we met, was among the parishioners most affected by the cathedral’s closure, as it represented the centre of his spiritual, civic, and social life. Born in Saint-Donat, he earned a bachelor’s degree in business administration, the same field he would work in until his retirement. He served as a churchwarden from 2017 until 2021 and had worked as a server for three different archbishops, as well as an officiator for years. Lechasseur’s engagement began in 1978 when, as a young adult, he was invited to join the cathedral’s liturgical committee. He remembered that after attending only one meeting he was asked to preside. Even though he had very little idea of what he was committing to, Lechasseur would remain involved with the committee for more than three decades. He recalled the parish from the 1970s to the 1990s as being “effervescent”, still filled with many Masses. Participating in the cathedral’s life, he explained,

brings us something on a human level. I met a wonderful family of extraordinary people. It was the same with the clergy; the priests were very pleasant and time flew by... We experienced great celebrations and the beautiful things of the cathedral and so I became more and more involved²⁹⁹.

3. *Appeals: 2011-2014*

According to Lechasseur, he, like most parishioners, reluctantly accepted the need to rationalise the city’s religious organisation with the understanding that some churches would eventually need

²⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, original : « Toute existence humaine est confrontée, un jour ou l'autre, à des pertes et des deuils. Or l'expérience nous apprend qu'il est souvent possible de transformer des pertes en gains ».

²⁹⁹ See Interview with Jean-Charles Lechasseur by Ryan Lux, February 7, 2020, at 2:45 mins., original : « nous apporte quelque chose sur le plan humaine. J'ai rencontré une très belle famille de personnes extraordinaires. Autant dans le domaine cléricale, les prêtres étaient très agréables et bon le temps va filer... On a vécu des grandes célébrations, les belles choses de la cathédrale et là je vais devenir de plus en plus impliqué ».

to close. When the city's pastoral team was united in 2006, anticipating the parish reorganisation, he was named the relay person³⁰⁰ who coordinated pastoral needs between the local communities of Saint-Germain, Sacré-Coeur and Nazareth, each with their own pastoral representative, together, which formed the larger pastoral unit called the Community of the Centre (*communauté de centre*). Relays, or liaisons of the local pastoral teams³⁰¹, would meet periodically to form the Council of Pastoral Unity³⁰² to coordinate liturgy on a parish-wide level. The teams functioned as a way of maintaining local community autonomy while facilitating the development of wider cohesion. This was an essential aim made necessary because, following the fusion, priests were no longer dedicated to each parish but rather would rotate through the city's churches as schedules and manpower dictated. Though Lechasseur was more involved in the cathedral community, his neighbourhood Sainte-Odile Parish was among the first to be closed and desacralised in 2008. He was, in fact, the last lay celebrant at the church. For him, any church closure is difficult, but not equally so: "There is a pain, a mourning to accomplish, but we knew that it was the lesser evil, that church, attached as I was to it, it was the least costly sacrifice for the whole"³⁰³. Even though Lechasseur understood that some sacrifices had to be made, he questioned the closure of Saint-Yves which was in a younger neighbourhood. With respect to Nazareth, Lechasseur was totally dumbfounded to witness

a growing community with children and extraordinary financial statements, but still they closed it ... I still remember seeing the life there; it was full. There was no reason for it. The church paid its fees, and it was active. They killed a community. Every time I think of it, the biggest misfortune I remember is the

³⁰⁰ *Personne relais.*

³⁰¹ *Équipes locales d'animation pastorale.*

³⁰² *Conseil Paroissial de l'Unité.*

³⁰³ See Interview with Jean-Charles Lechasseur by Ryan Lux, February 7, 2020, at 8:00 mins., original : « *Donc, il y a une peine, un deuil à vivre, mais on savait que c'est le moindre mal, cette église-là, même attaché, c'était le sacrifice le moins coûteux pour l'ensemble* ».

killing of communities. So that's where I first saw this kind of senseless massacre³⁰⁴.

While Sainte-Odile's closure passed amicably, Nazareth was a bellwether indicating the kinds of resistance the Parish Council could expect moving forward. In 2009 a collection of six community groups offered to purchase the church for \$75,000, arguing that they should not be expected to pay market value for the sprawling property on the shores of the Saint Lawrence because the church was paid for by residents and as such should be returned to them³⁰⁵. Given that the fused-Parish Council had closed the church to raise money, it refused to sell to the group but allowed them to rent the ground-level floor and transformed the church basement into a space to teach catechism classes. The church would not be sold until 2015, when it was purchased by a developer to build condominiums³⁰⁶.

Providence reserved the same fate for the other two churches, although in shorter order. Sainte-Odile and Saint-Yves both celebrated their last Masses on January 2, 2008. Saint-Odile was sold in June 2009 to be developed into condominiums and Saint-Yves was purchased in July of the same year to become a seniors' residence³⁰⁷. Multiple sources, including the clergy, acknowledge

³⁰⁴ *Idem.*, 9:00 mins., original, « une communauté en plein essor avec des enfants, des états financiers extraordinaires, mais on va fermer ... Je me rappelle encore de voir la vie, c'était plein. Il n'y avait aucune raison. Elle faisait ses frais, et elle était active. On va tuer une communauté. Chaque fois, le plus grand malheur que je retiens, c'est le massacre des communautés. C'est là donc où j'ai vu pour la première fois ce massacre sans aucune raison ».

³⁰⁵ See Pierre Michaud, « Fini les querelles pour l'église Nazareth », *Progrès-Echo-Le Rimouskois*, April 13, 2009, (web) consulted May 6, 2020, <http://www.diocesisrimouski.com/egl/egl/nazareth.pdf>.

³⁰⁶ See « Après la cathédrale, l'église de Nazareth », *Ici-Radio-Canada-Est du Québec*, April 30, 2015, (web), consulted March 16, 2021, <https://ici.radio-canada.ca/nouvelle/718534/eglise-vente-rimouski>.

³⁰⁷ See Ernie Wells, « Une vente qui libère le président de la Fabrique », *Progrès-Echo*, July 5, 2009, p. 3.

that the sale of these churches was a financial disappointment and that the Parish only broke even and thus was not the panacea initially anticipated³⁰⁸.

As the fused-Parish shed three churches, Abbé Gérald Roy, originally from Saint-Arsène and formerly the Archdiocese's Vicar General, 78, when I met him in 2020, was appointed priest moderator of the six-church-Parish. In 2011 he started becoming increasingly concerned about the state of the cathedral, which he noticed might need new windows and a fresh coat of paint. But when he consulted a parishioner who worked in construction, it became clear that the scale of urgent repairs was much larger, including the need for a new roof, which had been leaking for at least a decade. Abbé Roy, who holds an undergraduate degree in Philosophy and Theology as well as a master's from Saint Paul University in group and family pastoral care, was ordained in 1962 and has been semi-retired since 2014 – he was working as a chaplain when we spoke. Back in 2011, he assembled a group of parishioners with the appropriate expertise, and they presented him with a \$5 million figure as the cost to return the cathedral to good condition. Given that the fused-Parish had been running a deficit between \$30,000 and \$80,000 per year since 2008, and that it had only \$800,000 in reserves to maintain six churches, Abbé Roy launched a fundraising campaign.

The first bad sign: after soliciting 12 different notable parishioners to preside over the campaign, the abbé could not enlist anyone. Eventually, Abbé Roy was able to convince a friend to take on the job. Secondly, Abbé Roy waged a campaign sending personal letters inviting donations from the diocese's religious communities and affluent laity yielded only \$50,000. Third, a mass-mailing campaign of 22,000 letters netted a paltry \$25,000. Those sums added to an unsolicited previous

³⁰⁸ See Gérald Roy, « Mémoire présenté au Comité de consultation », Consultation sur l'avenir de la cathédrale, May 30, 2017, p. 5., (web), consulted May 6, 2021, <http://www.diocesisrimouski.com/consultation/memoires/cc-m007.pdf>.

donation from a parishioner to repair the cathedral came to less than \$200,000 of the \$5 million his *ad hoc* consultation estimated was required. Recalling the campaign, Abbé Roy admitted, “I was disappointed. I said to myself, yes, people want the cathedral to be repaired but they are not ready to contribute. That is magical thinking”³⁰⁹.

4. *Best-Laid-Plans of Mice and Men Often Go Awry*³¹⁰: 2014-2016

When it became apparent that the fundraiser had failed, Abbé Roy mentioned that he was approached by a local banker, Louis Khalil, who proposed new revenue streams. He proposed renting space to some of the city’s non-profit organisations. The pair quickly realised, however, those revenues would be insufficient to make the project practical and finance repairs. But the seed, once planted, finding a new vocation for the cathedral would remain a priority behind the scenes and unbeknownst to most parishioners or residents³¹¹.

On New Year’s Day 2014, Mgr. Fournier published a letter addressed to all diocesans which reflected the futures of their parishes and, more particularly, of their churches. He shared in his missive that, in November 2013, the diocese’s nearly 80 priests attended a synodal session dedicated to the theme “What future for our churches?” where they shared the challenges faced by the diocese’s 103 parishes. Mgr. Fournier highlighted the fact that too many diocesan parishes ran deficits in 2013 and, as such, invited the Catholics of his territory to seriously consider the viability of their communities:

[d]espite all the attachment we may have for our parish church - the heart of the village and the gathering place of the community - the burden of keeping them

³⁰⁹ See interview with Abbé Gérald Roy by Ryan Lux, February 6, 2020, at 7:30 mins., original: « *Moi, j’étais déçu. Je me suis dit, oui, les gens veulent que l’on répare la cathédrale, mais ne sont pas prêts à donner les sous. C’est la pensée magique* ».

³¹⁰ See Robert Burns, “To a Mouse on Turning Her Up in Her Nest with the Plough”, in John Wilson (dir.), *Kilmarnock Edition*, 1786.

³¹¹ *Idem.*, 12 :00 mins.

in good condition becomes excessive in some cases and consumes so much energy that pastoral life itself suffers³¹².

Almost as soon as the ink on the archbishop's letter had dried, Saint-Germain Parish had established its advisory committee, which was composed of ten members, including Parish Council President René Roy, priest, Abbé Arthur Leclerc, banker, Louis Khalil, University of Quebec at Rimouski rector, Michel Ringuet, real estate agent, Françoise Soucy, and several parishioners.

In response, Abbé Roy, along with Abbé Leclerc, together drafted detailed reports on the Parish's six remaining local communities, which describe their logistical responsibilities (buildings, finances, staff) and religious dynamics (religious practice, community groups, volunteers, laity participation, catechism, and identity). Readers can sense immediately Abbé Roy's frustration, when on the first page of his intervention he described the fused-Parish's unwieldy organisation as "pretty on paper, but in reality, it is difficult to coordinate local communities"³¹³. He lamented that the laity who lead the local communities were poorly equipped to perform their task of fostering intercommunity links, adding that the overall vitality of the fused-Parish was hampered by the bitterness of those whose churches were closed. Abbé Roy even questions the meaning of "community", as it newly applied to the city-wide Parish, asking whether it meant: those active within the Church? All those who reside on the territory? Occasional practitioners (Easter,

³¹² See Mgr. Pierre-André Fournier, « Lettre de Mgr. Pierre-André Fournier adressé aux diocésains et diocésaines », Rimouski, Diocese of Rimouski, January 1, 2014, original: « *Malgré tout l'attachement que nous pouvons avoir pour l'église paroissiale, cœur du village et lieu de rassemblement de la communauté, le fardeau de les conserver en bon état devient excessif en certains cas et mobilise tant d'énergie que c'est la vie pastorale elle-même qui en souffre* ».

³¹³ See Gérald Roy, « Vitalité des communautés », Paroisse Saint-Germain de Rimouski, October 2014, p. 1, (web), consulted May 6, 2021, http://www.diocesisrimouski.com/riki/pdf/rapport_comite_aviseur_2014-annexes2.pdf, original: « *Sur papier, c'est une belle organisation, mais, dans la réalité, l'animation des communautés locales est difficile* ».

Christmas, marriages, funerals)? Community groups? The religious communities where many laypeople practice? Those who pay their tithes? ³¹⁴

Abbé Roy's report also provided insight into the vitality of the cathedral itself, just before its closure. On an average Sunday, 400 people (out of a parish population of 4,000) would attend a single mass in the cathedral with space enough for 940 souls. During the weekday masses on Monday and Friday, one could expect roughly 65 people. In 2013, there were 45 baptisms, 60 funerals, 10 marriages and 10 confirmations³¹⁵. He acknowledged that it is the most visited church by tourists and is the centre for senior and student religious life. Yet, among other deficiencies, Abbé Roy noted insufficient parking, only 100 spots for an average Sunday attendance of 400, as well as a dearth of appropriately sized rooms for more intimate events and pastoral care. Lastly, Abbé Roy reflected on the sources of harm his parish's vitality such as shortage of priests, apathy and indifference among the faithful, the mercantile conception of the Church as merely a purveyor of sacraments, parishioners' repeated disappointments with the Church, lack of knowledge, absence of collective projects and the close-mindedness of members of certain committees³¹⁶.

Archdiocesan treasurer Michel Lavoie also submitted a brief to the advisory committee, which calculated the financial impact of the three scenarios. All three were based on the premise that the weekly Sunday offerings would remain the same³¹⁷, that annual tithes would decrease by half and that each scenario would produce savings on expenses. It should also be noted that in each of these three scenarios, Lavoie assumes the proceeds from church sales are invested and so he factored in the additional interest into the accounts. The first scenario was based on selling the Parish's five

³¹⁴ *Idem.*, p. 2.

³¹⁵ *Idem.*, p.4.

³¹⁶ *Idem.*, p. 8.

³¹⁷ A questionable assumption based on Abbé Roy's own report of the experience of the three previous church closures.

other churches and keeping only the cathedral. Lavoie estimated the value of these to be \$3 million, but that financing the estimated \$4.5 million in renovations would still leave the Parish with an annual deficit of \$236,487. In the second scenario, the Parish would have kept only Saint-Pie-X and Saint-Robert, which would produce a surplus of \$154,266. A third scenario would also retain Pointe-au-Père, an extremely popular pilgrimage site, which would reduce the surplus to \$98,515³¹⁸.

Thusly informed, the advisory committee returned its report on November 8, 2014. In the preamble, the committee noted that part of the problem lay in Rimouski, having continued to build immense churches through the 1960s, such as Saint-Robert, Saint-Pie-X and Sainte-Agnès (nearly 2,000 new spaces) to fill an acute need for additional space that the Quiet Revolution's wave of secularisation made temporary. In a sweeping assessment, they contended, "[f]ewer and fewer faithful attend the celebrations. They come for cultural reasons rather than conviction; many people only attend church at baptisms, weddings and funerals"³¹⁹.

The committee emphasised that it was not within their purview to judge the social acceptability of the envisaged scenarios and that they unanimously agreed that, before proceeding to any decision or action, considerable public consultations would be paramount. In other words, they issued a warning to the Parish Council and the clergy that their ultimate recommendation to part with the cathedral would be deeply unpopular. Even so, the report insisted that "[t]he situation is almost inextricable. This is why, in the opinion of the advisory committee, this heritage building cannot

³¹⁸ See Michel Lavoie, « Analyse financière des scénarios de fermetures d'églises », Paroisse Saint-Germain de Rimouski, 2014.

³¹⁹ See « Pour assurer la poursuite de la MISSION de la paroisse St-Germain », Saint-Germain-de-Rimouski Parish Advisory Committee, November 8, 2014, (web), consulted May 6, 2021, http://www.diocesisrimouski.com/riki/pdf/rapport_comite_aviseur_2014.pdf, original: « *De moins en moins fidèles assistent aux célébrations. Il arrive que par le biais culturel plus que par conviction, plusieurs ne côtoient l'église que lors des baptêmes, mariages et funérailles* ».

be the sole responsibility of the Saint-Germain Parish, but rather that of the entire Rimouski community”³²⁰. Accordingly, the committee urged the Parish Council that it was no longer capable of maintaining the building and that all activities inside the cathedral should cease by the following Easter, April 6, 2015. Moreover, given that only 1,500 Rimouskois attended Sunday Mass, they recommended the Parish could manage with only one church with a capacity of 800 by offering multiple Masses but cautioned that keeping two for the near future would be advisable for occasions such as Christmas and Easter. This meant keeping Saint-Robert, with a capacity of 800, and Saint-Pie-X with a capacity of 650. Though, the report did not explicitly say so, it did recommend selling all the other churches by no later than 2015, specifically Sainte-Agnès which occupied valuable land.

Éric Forest, long-time mayor of Rimouski, reached out to the Parish and to Archbishop Fournier as far back as 2011, proposing a diametrically opposite strategy. Aged 68 when he welcomed me to his Ottawa office in the attic of the East Block, Forest has a bachelor’s degree in recreation studies from the Université du Québec à Trois-Rivières earned in 1977. He started his political career in Pointe-au-Père in 1982. Otherwise, Forest was the president of the local hockey team, *Les Océanics*, between 1995 and 2005 and the city mayor between 2005 and 2016, when he was appointed to the federal upper chamber.

In 2011, when Abbé Roy had the cathedral professionally inspected, Forest was trying to move forward with one of his recent campaign promises, which was to transform the parking lot between the cathedral and the Saint Lawrence River into a public plaza with a multi-level parking garage, which could simultaneously solve the downtown’s shortage of parking and beautify the waterfront.

³²⁰ *Idem.*, p. 11, original: « *La situation est quasi inextricable. C'est pourquoi, dans la perception du comité aviseur, ce bâti patrimonial ne peut être la seule responsabilité de la paroisse St-Germain, mais plutôt celle de toute la communauté rimouskoise* ».

The reason his project involved the Parish is because the title to the land where the parking lot sits was disputed between the City and the Parish, for in the not-so-distant past they collaborated on collective projects, without worrying about details, given they shared the same constituents. When it came to the mayor's attention that the Parish needed funds to carry out repairs on the cathedral, Forest proposed to purchase the parking lot, the cathedral rectory and Saint-Pie-X - which stands next to the city's sprawling athletics complex and could easily be incorporated - all for market value, on the condition the funds be designated exclusively to renovate the cathedral. Forest, who is a believer but seldom practices, explained that he appreciates the cathedral's symbolic and strategic value for the city and, as mayor, thought his proposal an elegant way for a municipality to intervene in a positive manner.

It was not Forest's first time intervening in diocesan matters. Some time before, Mgr. Fournier asked Forest to intervene in a financial conflict between the Rimouski Cemetery Corporation, which is owned by the Parish Council, and local funeral parlours; he met with the archbishop and treasurer Lavoie, whom he referred to as "the famous Monsieur Lavoie. I put an end to that misunderstanding. We had a very good relationship between Mgr. Fournier and me"³²¹. The Parish Council, however, was not interested in selling Saint-Pie-X or breaking up the parking lot lands and the rectory from the cathedral. Despite his efforts, Mayor Éric Forest would find out about the cathedral's closure, like everyone else, from a small sign posted on the cathedral's door Friday, November 28, 2014, just less than three weeks after the advisory committee submitted its final report.

³²¹ See interview with Éric Forest by Ryan Lux, February 25, 2020, 2:25 mins., original: « *Donc je suis intervenu comme médiateur et j'ai rencontré avec Mgr. Fournier et Monsieur Lavoie, le fameux Monsieur Lavoie. Donc, j'ai mis fin à cette mésentente-là. On avait quand même un très bon lien entre Mgr. Fournier et moi* ».

C. The Rise and fall of Committee Cathedral 1862: November 28, 2014 – January 2017

On November 26, 2014, during a Christmas choir rehearsal Abbé Roy went looking for a small electric organ that was kept in a rarely used vestibule at the front of the cathedral when he noticed a piece of moulded plaster, around the size of a fist, that had fallen from the top of one of the columns, a height of 15 metres. Abbé Roy brought the plaster to the archbishop, who convened an emergency meeting with the Parish Council president, as well as engineers and architects, who convinced him that the cathedral presented a danger to public safety. Accordingly, Mgr. Fournier ordered the cathedral ‘temporarily’ closed until urgent repairs could be completed.

That morning, Jean-Charles Lechasseur was shocked when he learned that he would be attending Sunday Mass at Saint-Pie-X as instructed by the sign on the cathedral door, which redirected the cathedral’s parishioners to the modernist church up the street. The devout parishioner had no reason to doubt his bishop, so he believed the closure would be temporary:

There was disarray. He told us you are going to live with the Saint-Pie-X community. We are in good faith. I went there. I became co-supervisor with the other liturgy committee. We continued to live, to hope. There were all sorts of analyses. Wait and a solution will come. That’s what the bishop, at the time, told us. If we are not able to keep things exactly the same, we compromised³²².

The Parish Council president spent the next few days emphasising the cathedral’s decrepitude in the press, warning the public, who still did not know the cathedral was closed and had not read the advisory report that its masonry was at risk of dislodging³²³. Mgr. Fournier told those gathered at

³²² See interview with Jean-Charles Lechasseur by Ryan Lux, February 7, 2020, 31:45 mins., original: « *Il y avait un désarroi. Il nous a dit vous allez vivre avec la communauté Pie-X. Nous, on est de bonne foi. Moi, je m'en allais là-bas. Je deviens coresponsable avec l'autre service de liturgie. On continue à vivre, espérer. Il y a toutes sortes d'analyses, attendre, et là va naître, ce que l'évêque à l'époque va dire, si on n'est pas capable de la conserver comme telle, on va chercher des solutions* ».

³²³ See « Le sort de la cathédrale de Rimouski bientôt connu », *Ici Radio-Canada Bas-Saint-Laurent*, November 28, 2014, (web), consulted March 16, 2021, <https://ici.radio-canada.ca/nouvelle/695940/rimouski-cathedrale-decision-renovation>.

Saint-Pie-X, “obviously, we are all shaken by the speed with which this decision was taken. For me, what gives me strength in this event is that the decision was taken together”³²⁴. Some media reports contrasted the sadness visible on the faces of parishioners with the serenity of Abbé Roy’s as he apologised for “the great disturbance”³²⁵ - a reference to the Acadian deportation. It was not until December that Mgr. Fournier openly mused that one option for the cathedral might be a change of vocation and thus desacralisation³²⁶.

1. The unexpected loss of a conciliatory force

It would also be the last time the archbishop would pronounce publicly about the cathedral due to his sudden death on January 10, 2015. Mgr. Fournier underwent heart surgery in Quebec City December 17, 2014, and was recovering at the bishop’s palace when, in the middle of blessing visitors, he lost consciousness³²⁷. Fellow clergy and local politicians similarly eulogised the archbishop as a welcoming friend, selfless, close to those suffering, devout, sensitive, and humanistic. They unanimously underscored how his death would be an incredible loss for the region³²⁸.

Their assessment was similarly unanimous that it was the weight of the cathedral’s destiny that expedited the archbishop’s death³²⁹. Mgr. Fournier’s death changed the way Lechasseur

³²⁴ See « Premier dimanche sans messe à la cathédrale », *Ici Radio-Canada-Est du Québec*, November 30, 2014, (web), consulted March 16, 2021, <https://ici.radio-canada.ca/nouvelle/696161/messe-cathedrale-rimouski-fermee>, original: « Évidemment nous sommes tous ébranlés de la rapidité avec laquelle cette décision a été prise. Pour moi, ce qui me donne de la force dans cet événement, c’est que la décision a été prise ensemble ».

³²⁵ See Thérèse Martin, « Les fidèles ‘déportés’ à Saint-Pie-X », *L’Avantage*, December 3, 2014, p. 5.

³²⁶ See Carl Thériault, « Pas de messe de minuit à la cathédrale de Rimouski », *La Presse*, December 3, 2014, p. A12.

³²⁷ See Thérèse Martin, « Un héritage de bonté et de générosité », *L’Avantage, Votre journal*, 19(32), January 14, 2015, p. 4.

³²⁸ Thérèse Martin, « Le diocèse de Rimouski pleure son pasteur », *L’Avantage, Votre journal*, 19(32), January 14, 2015, p. 5.

³²⁹ See interviews with Jean-Charles Lechasseur, Abbé Gérald Roy, Abbé Guy Lagacé, and Éric Forest, by Ryan Lux.

understood the cathedral's closure, recalling something the archbishop told him several weeks before while he was performing his duties: "he told me that 'alone a man can do nothing'. I understood later what he was teaching me. It was that within the archdiocese there was a whole context of control, constraining the bishop especially"³³⁰. Not only did Lechasseur blame Rimouski's *curia*, specifically treasurer Michel Lavoie and Chancellor Yves Mélançon, for hastening Mgr. Fournier's death, but he, among others, began to suspect that the cathedral's infirmity was at best exaggerated, and at worst exploited. He believed the exaggeration of danger was imagined to expedite the advisory committee's recommendations, which were not made public until weeks later. Abbé Roy's decision soon had personal consequences, which alerted him to the reverberations of his decision:

There are people who have accused us of having knowingly wanted to close the cathedral and have accused me of having invented the danger. It was not me who closed the cathedral; it was the will of the bishop; I brought what I saw, and it was my obligation³³¹.

2. *Committee 1862: A forgone conclusion?*

Less than three weeks after Mgr. Fournier's death, local media reported that the late archbishop had indicated that he was nearly ready to pronounce on the cathedral's destiny, had chosen to change its vocation, and that a new committee had been formed to orient the project that would hold its first meeting in mid-February³³². The article likewise mentioned that local banker Louis

³³⁰ See interview with Jean-Charles Lechasseur by Ryan Lux, February 7, 2020, 26:00 mins., original: « *c'est lui qui m'a dit que seul un homme ne peut rien faire. J'ai compris plus tard ce qu'il m'instruit. C'est qu'à l'archevêché, il y avait tout un contexte qui allait le contraindre, contraignant surtout l'évêque* ».

³³¹ See interview with Gérard Roy by Ryan Lux, February 6, 2020, 30:00 mins., original: « *Il y a des gens qui, en se regroupant, nous ont accusés d'avoir sciemment voulu fermer la cathédrale et m'ont accusé d'avoir inventé la dangerosité. Ce n'est pas moi qui ai fermé la cathédrale, c'est la volonté de l'évêque, moi j'ai rapporté ce que j'ai vu et c'était mon obligation* ».

³³² See Thérèse Martin, « Plus un fleuron patrimonial qu'un lieu de culte », *L'Avantage, Votre journal*, 19(34), January 28, 2015, p. 5.

Khalil would play a leading role. Throughout March, the Parish Council held public meetings at each of the city's five open churches and attracted between 100 and 200 people to each. They presented the advisory committee with the objective of "informing the public and listening to their reactions"³³³. Abbé Gérald Roy told reporters, "[w]e must avoid bankruptcy because we have a mission to protect. It is better to make cuts in bricks and mortar than the services offered to the people"³³⁴. The public meetings effectively served notice to members of each local community (church) that it was time to mobilise if they wanted to keep their churches open, unleashing, in effect, a "*guerre des clochers*"³³⁵.

Committee 1862³³⁶, christened in reference to the year the cathedral was completed, introduced itself to the public by hosting a meeting on April 27, 2015, where it presented its vision for a secular new vocation for the cathedral, which would be dedicated to cultural and community pursuits³³⁷. The committee insisted that five parties would need to participate for the project to succeed: the Archdiocese, the Parish, the City, entrepreneurs, and the citizens of Rimouski. The Parish would need to sell the parking lot lands, also known as Veterans' Square, to the city for \$1 million; the City would also need to subsidise the efforts of the Rimouski Heritage Society to lobby the Ministry of Culture and Communications to endow the cathedral with heritage status.

³³³ See Thérèse Martin, « Fermetures d'églises à Rimouski : des décisions difficiles mais nécessaires », *L'Avantage*, *Votre journal*, March 18, 2015, (web) consulted September 18, 2017, <https://www.lavantage.qc.ca/actualites/2015/3/18/fermeture-d-eglises-a-rimouski-des-deci-4081750.html>.

³³⁴ *Ibid.*, original: « Nous devons éviter la faillite, car nous avons une mission à protéger. Il vaut mieux couper dans la pierre et les bâtisses que dans les services à donner à la population ».

³³⁵ See « Rimouski: campagne pour sauver les églises », *Ici-Radio-Canada - Est du Québec*, April 17, 2015, (web) consulted March 16, 2021, <https://ici.radio-canada.ca/nouvelle/716416/capitation-eglises-saint-germain-rimouski-cathedrale-avenir>.

³³⁶ Composed of financier Louis Khalil, Abbé Gérald Roy, city councillors Pierre Chassé and Jennifer Murray, as well as president of the local heritage organisation Pascal Gagnon.

³³⁷ See Johanne Fournier, « Cathédrale de Rimouski : un changement de vocation pour échapper à la démolition », *Le Soleil*, April 28, 2015, (web), consulted February 2, 2021, <https://www.lesoleil.com/actualite/cathedrale-de-rimouski-un-changement-de-vocation-pour-echapper-a-la-demolition-12ebc938d0536f0fcf73d9eb408fafbe>.

Committee 1862, germinated privately between Abbé Roy and Louis Khalil³³⁸, legitimated by the advisory committee report and the failed fundraising campaign, attracted widespread political support, including that of local national member of Parliament, Harold Lebel, who lauded the project and volunteered his collaboration, affirming that

[t]he preservation of Saint-Germain Cathedral is essential. It is a monument that has been part of Rimouski's social landscape and identity since 1862. It is not surprising that the entire community feels concerned and expects the national State of Québec to be a partner in this mobilisation³³⁹.

Mayor Éric Forest agreed to support an initiative that would leverage upper-level governments' funding to preserve the cathedral's exterior, which the City recognises as forming an integral part of the downtown's protected heritage district but stipulated that further engagement would require consulting citizens via a referendum³⁴⁰.

In the realm of public opinion, the local press was enamoured by Khalil's initiative, praising him for planning the cathedral's transformation, "even before the starting signal. He took up the pilgrim's staff in the autumn and yes, he is ready to get involved and rally the community for the final rescue effort"³⁴¹. In the same column, Khalil is quoted posing an ultimatum to Rimouskois: either a new community and cultural vocation or demolition. An active member of the Parish and former churchwarden Alain Rioux warned that parishioners should not view the new committee as a *fait accompli*:

³³⁸ See Thérèse Martin, « Plus un fleuron patrimonial qu'un lieu de culte », *L'Avantage, Votre journal*, 19(34), January 28, 2015, p. 5.

³³⁹ See Thérèse Martin, « Harold Lebel et la Cathédrale », *L'Avantage, Votre journal*, 19(48), May 6, 2015, p. 9, original: « *La sauvegarde de la Cathédrale Saint-Germain est incontournable. C'est un monument qui imprègne le paysage social et identitaire de Rimouski depuis 1862. Pas étonnant que toute la communauté se sente interpellée et qu'elle s'attende à ce que l'État national du Québec soit partenaire dans cette mobilisation* ».

³⁴⁰ See Thérèse Martin, « La survie de la Cathédrale est un défi collectif », *L'Avantage, Votre journal*, 18(41), March 18, 2015, p. 5.

³⁴¹ See Jean-Claude Leclerc, « 100% sûr d'échouer, si l'on ne fait rien! », *L'Avantage, Votre journal*, 19(48), May 6, 2015, p. 10.

As a result, people are disengaging themselves from the responsibility of maintaining assets that they themselves have financed in the past...now we are getting the message that it is none of our business, that the Parish is giving up and that some vague committee will come up with a miracle solution that will relieve us of the burden of the Cathedral³⁴²

Rioux's comments about the committee's opaque nature and the foregone conclusion of its affairs would turn out to be prophetic, but his were not the only concerns regarding the presentation. Following the public meeting, there was some trepidation expressed. Firstly, over the project's plans to erect multiple stories within the nave. Saint-Germain possesses a world-class organ whose sonority is harmonised to the open dimensions of the nave and Committee 1862's project would effectively render the instrument obsolete. Secondly, others were worried about how the city's involvement would affect their taxes³⁴³.

But returning to the committee's composition, in addition to the religious and political domains, Committee 1862 engaged the civil sphere. Pascal Gagnon, a local Cégep³⁴⁴ professor of History, offered the assistance of the Rimouski Heritage Society in 2012 when the Parish first began considering renovations, but it was not until the formation of Committee 1862 that his organisation was invited to officially participate.

Born and raised in Rimouski, Gagnon, 41 when we spoke first, took a civic interest in the cathedral in 2010 when he would bring his students of medieval history there to examine the building's neo-gothic architecture. He studied History himself at the University du Québec à Trois-Rivières. In

³⁴² See Thérèse Martin, « La survie de la Cathédrale est un défi collectif », *L'Avantage, Votre journal*, 18(41), March 18, 2015, p. 5, original: « *En conséquence, les gens se désengagent de la responsabilité de l'entretien des biens qu'ils ont eux-mêmes financés dans le passé... Maintenant, nous recevons le message que ce n'est plus de nos affaires, que la fabrique baisse le bras et qu'un vague comité proposera une solution miracle qui nous débarrassera du fardeau de la Cathédrale* ».

³⁴³ See Thérèse Martin, « Des participants inquiets mais solidaires », *L'Avantage, Votre journal*, 19(48), May 6, 2015, p. 4.

³⁴⁴ In the Quebec public education system, a system of colleges provides the last year of high school and the first year of post-secondary, for those pursuing education and training beyond what is elsewhere considered the 11th grade.

2011 he joined Rimouski's Heritage Society and in 2012 he was elected its president. The heritage society's mission is to provide background and expertise regarding the city's built heritage and advice to property owners and the city on how best to valorise and respect its integrity.

Gagnon's relationship to Catholicism is like many Rimouskois'; he gives religion the benefit of doubt and even though he does not practise regularly, he baptised his children and takes them to Mass on holidays so that they can experience a culture he doubts will exist when they are adults. His motivations for bringing his children to Mass are the same as his engagement with Committee 1862: "I want them to see these traditions and to be able to live them to a certain extent, to become aware of their built heritage and to make them aware of the importance that these churches have had, and of the importance of preserving them and possibly finding a new use for them"³⁴⁵. Yet, what fascinates Gagnon more than religion is heritage. Growing up near the cathedral, Gagnon remembers always being fascinated by its seemingly ancient character and that, during his bachelor's degree, his curiosity developed into a keen interest in Québec's built heritage. Gagnon viewed the Heritage Society's key role as one of generating awareness about and appreciation for the cathedral's heritage value, locally and nationally, despite the poor status awarded to it by what he qualifies as an incoherent bureaucracy – the Religious Heritage Council. Accordingly, Gagnon's main, and not inconsiderable task, as part of the Committee 1862 was to convince the Ministry of Culture to reconsider its assessment of Saint-Germain Cathedral.

Gagnon took exception with Quebec's Religious Heritage Council's assessment of the cathedral, which, as noted above, disqualified the church because of its 1967 renovation. Quite the opposite,

³⁴⁵ See interview with Pascal Gagnon by Ryan Lux, February 7, 2020, 19:20 mins., original: « *Je veux quand même qu'ils voient ces traditions-là et qu'ils puissent les vivre dans une certaine mesure, puis qu'ils prennent connaissance de leurs patrimoines bâti et les sensibiliser à l'importance que ces églises ont eue, puis à l'importance de conserver et aussi de trouver éventuellement un nouvel usage* ».

Gagnon believed the renovations make the cathedral even more valuable, noting that nowhere else in Quebec is there a cathedral with a neo-gothic exterior and a Vatican II interior, a quality which witnesses the building's evolution with History. Moreover, he insists that the renovations "restored the Cathedral's original characteristics: verticality and light. What was removed from the interior of the cathedral were additions"³⁴⁶. So, knowing the cathedral needed allies, Gagnon set about a public relations campaign to rehabilitate the cathedral's heritage credibility. His first endeavour was to use the Congress of the Francophone Association for Knowledge³⁴⁷, scheduled for Rimouski May 25-29, 2015, to generate support for the cathedral. The congress, organised by the Université du Québec à Rimouski (UQAR) and the local Cégep, attracted 3,500 national and international researchers to Rimouski and Gagnon used the stage to present the cathedral's history in the former sacristy³⁴⁸. In addition to two public conferences, held in May and June^{349, 350}, Gagnon and the local heritage society invited a distinguished religious heritage scholar, Luc Noppen, for an October conference where he challenged the logic of the Religious Heritage Council's paltry assessment of the cathedral³⁵¹. Gagnon's considerable efforts, in his capacity as a member of the Heritage Society, culminated with the official request for heritage status. The

³⁴⁶ See Thérèse Martin, « Le Québec a les yeux tournés vers la Cathédrale de Rimouski », *L'Avantage, Votre journal*, 19(48), p.4, original: « on a alors redonné à la Cathédrale ses caractéristiques d'origine, sa verticalité et on a permis à la lumière d'y entrer. Ce qui a été retiré de l'intérieur de la cathédrale était des ajouts qui avaient été faits après sa construction ».

³⁴⁷ *L'Association Canadienne francophone pour le savoir (ACFAS)*.

³⁴⁸ See Thérèse Martin, « La cathédrale, l'une des vedettes de l'ACFAS », *L'Avantage, Votre journal*, 19(49), May 13, 2015, p. 6.

³⁴⁹ See Thérèse Martin, « Conférence sur la Cathédrale Saint-Germain », *L'Avantage, Votre journal*, 19(51), May 27, 2015, p. 43.

³⁵⁰ See Thérèse Martin, « La valeur de la Cathédrale est incontestable », *L'Avantage, Votre journal*, 20(01), June 10, 2015, p. 6.

³⁵¹ See Diane Joly, « La cathédrale de Rimouski: s'allier pour mieux défendre le patrimoine », *Consultant en patrimoine*, blog post, September 1, 2015, (web), consulted January 31, 2021, <https://dianejoly.ca/la-cathedrale-de-rimouski-sallier-pour-mieux-defendre-le-patrimoine/#:~:text=Construite%20entre%201854%20et%201859,d%C3%A9coration%20int%C3%A9rieure%20le%20%C3%A9labor%C3%A9e>.

document was thorough; at nearly 400 pages, it referenced 76 documents and included more than 100 photographs³⁵².

In addition to its collaboration with Committee 1862, the Parish was busy preparing for the June 14, 2015, installation of its new archbishop, Mgr. Denis Grondin from the Archdiocese of Quebec. During his homily, before a standing-room-only at Saint-Robert's, Mgr. Grondin insisted on the importance of listening: "the primary aptitude"³⁵³. Mayor Éric Forest, who had been advising and mediating for Mgr. Fournier for years described the inexperienced bishop's new position as already unenviable when he arrived, given that his first official act would be to decide on the advisory committee report.

There is this history of bickering between groups to save the cathedral, the parish, the Parish Council and then Bishop Fournier died. Perhaps it was this file that killed him. And then they sent Mgr. Grondin and unfortunately, he got dumped into a boiling cauldron. Bishop Grondin asked me at one point, 'I want to meet you' ... and I told him straight out, 'Monseigneur, the Catholic Church teaches charity on the one hand, and now we are in a situation that is really inglorious' because of petty disputes³⁵⁴.

As Mgr. Grondin settled into his new position, Committee 1862 proceeded with its efforts to find a project for the cathedral when they happened to learn that the local arts and culture cooperative needed a new space and hoped to relocate downtown. The strategy informing the proposal was to concentrate eligibility for grants and subsidies from all three levels of government, which had each already agreed to support Coop Paradis' relocation, by convincing the Quebec government to

³⁵² See Thérèse Martin, « Un joyau pour l'ensemble du Québec », *L'Avantage, Votre journal*, 20(27), December 9, 2015, p. 18.

³⁵³ See Thérèse Martin, « Rimouski accueille son nouvel archevêque », *L'Avantage, votre journal*, 20(02), June 17, 2015, p. 12, original: « *l'aptitude première* ».

³⁵⁴ See interview with Éric Forest by Ryan Lux, February 25, 2020, 9:00 mins, original: « *Il y a l'histoire des chicanes entre les groupes pour sauver la cathédrale, la fabrique, l'archevêché et puis Mgr. Fournier est décédé. Peut-être c'est ce dossier qui lui a tué. Et puis ils ont envoyé Mgr. Grondin, et malheureusement, il est envoyé dans ce bassin-là. Mgr. Grondin m'a demandé à un moment donné, je veux vous rencontrer ... et je lui ai carrément dit, Monseigneur, l'Église catholique enseigne d'une part la charité, actuellement on est dans une situation qui n'est pas vraiment glorieuse, parce que c'est des chicanes mesquins* ».

recognise the cathedral's heritage status³⁵⁵. Mgr. Grondin publicly expressed his confidence in Committee 1862 soon after the idea was proposed, emphasising that responsibility for the cathedral's destiny did not rest on his shoulders alone³⁵⁶. By November, the city council tentatively endorsed the plan approving \$20,600 for Committee 1862 and Coop Paradis to study the feasibility of simultaneously accomplishing their objectives³⁵⁷.

The cathedral's destiny optimistically deemed resolved, the day after the city signalled support for Committee 1862's plan, Mgr. Grondin finally, after months of delays, pronounced before a crowd of 500, on the fates of Sacré-Coeur and Sainte-Agnès' churches: the latter would be closed, and the former spared. The archbishop cited Sacré-Coeur's fund-raising pluck for keeping their church off the chopping block³⁵⁸. Abbé Roy, however, warned reporters that the decision would allow parishioners to breathe easier for the time being, describing the remaining churches as "on life support"³⁵⁹. Before Sainte-Agnès' last Mass, its parishioners as well as those whom they inherited with the closure of Saint-Yves, were invited by the pastoral team to discuss the closure process, where staff and volunteers promoted the idea that communities could continue to thrive without churches and that "faith lies in the heart and not in the stone"³⁶⁰.

³⁵⁵ See Thérèse Martin, « La Coop Paradis peut être logée dans la Cathédrale », *L'Avantage, Votre journal*, 20(12), August 26, 2015, p. 4.

³⁵⁶ See Thérèse Martin, « Mgr. Grondin fait confiance au comité Cathédrale 1862 », *L'Avantage, Votre journal*, 20(14), September 9, 2015, p. 8.

³⁵⁷ See Thérèse Martin, « Rimouski soutient la Coop Paradis » *L'Avantage, Votre journal*, 20(24), November 18, 2015, p. 18.

³⁵⁸ « Une église ferme, mais une autre est sauvée à Rimouski », *Ici Radio-Canada*, November 19, 2015, (web), consulted February 1, 2021, <https://ici.radio-canada.ca/nouvelle/750841/eglises-fermeture-rimouski-culte-catholique#:~:text=La%20d%C3%A9cision%20est%20tomb%C3%A9e%20jeudi,le%20m%C3%A9me%20sort%20est%20sauv%C3%A9e.&text=L'%C3%A9glise%20qui%20est%20%C3%A9pargn%C3%A9e,l'entr%C3%A9e%20ouest%20de%20Rimouski>.

³⁵⁹ See Jean-Claude Leclerc, « Un 'plaster' sur le bobo », *L'Avantage, Votre journal*, 20(25), November 25, 2015, p. 10.

³⁶⁰ See Thérèse Martin, « Les paroissiens de Sainte-Agnès/Saint-Yves sont convoqués », *L'Avantage, Votre journal*, 20(43), March 30, 2016, p. 4, original: « la foi réside dans le cœur et non dans la pierre ».

3. *Committee 2016: a Non-transformative Approach*

While Committee 1862 proceeded with their work to transform the cathedral: drawing up architectural plans, applying for grants and heritage status³⁶¹, a new committee formed which would present a formidable obstacle to their plans. Committee Cathedral 2016 shared its manifesto in the spring:

Our objectives are to integrally save the cathedral of Rimouski as an historical witness of our region, and to carry out the restoration work allowing it to regain its principal function: a place of worship ... The committee consciously chose to call itself Committee Cathedral 2016, because we want to look to the future. We are not in a confrontational dynamic. We are a group of people who want to use their respective expertise to ensure the permanence of the cathedral, through an organisation independent of the Parish and the Parish Council. Our project will be carried out in a spirit of partnership³⁶².

The new committee emphasised that they would seek to complement the cathedral's religious vocation with cultural uses and were confident that the local business community and residents could collect enough funds to solve the building's structural problems. In view of the impressive cross-section of local entrepreneurs and experts, in June 2016, Committee 1862 recommended the Parish accept Committee Cathedral 2016's proposal, but not without a hint of dismay:

There is disappointment because, as there were no other options, we worked hard to find a solution that was possible and realistic. At the same time, we are happy because the primary mission of our committee was to ensure the preservation of

³⁶¹ All submitted to the Ministry of Culture in April 2015 at a cost of \$45,000 (nearly \$25,000 from the parish). See Thérèse Martin, « Le plan de sauvetage sera dévoilé en avril », *L'Avantage, Votre journal*, 20(40), March 9, 2016, p. 9.

³⁶² See Pierre Michaud, « Le nouveau comité pour la cathédrale se dévoile », *L'Avantage, Votre journal*, 20(46), April 20, 2016, p. 3, original: « Nos objectifs sont de sauvegarder la cathédrale de Rimouski dans son intégralité, comme témoin historique de notre région, et d'y effectuer les travaux de restauration permettant d'y retrouver sa fonction principale: un lieu de culte... Le comité a choisi consciemment de s'appeler Comité 2016, parce que nous voulons regarder vers l'avenir. Nous ne sommes pas dans une dynamique de l'affrontement. Nous sommes un groupe de personnes qui veulent mettre à profit leurs expertises respectives pour assurer la pérennité de la cathédrale, par le biais d'un organisme indépendant de la Fabrique Saint-Germain et de l'archevêché. Notre projet se veut à réaliser dans un esprit de partenariat ».

the cathedral, and we believe that we now have the elements on the table to achieve this objective³⁶³.

Unlike members of Committee 1862 who agreed to work with Committee 2016, parish and archdiocesan administrators experienced the new committee's challenge as a shot across the bow and rightfully worried about the effect of introducing a new constituency into Parish affairs: well-heeled, infrequent churchgoers, identity Catholics, more inclined to question clergy and authority, and representative of the vast majority of Rimouskois. Even more worrisome for authorities, they were well organised and equipped with a charismatic, well-connected leader. It did not take long, two weeks, for conflict between the movement's leader, Jacques Landry, and Parish Council president Norman Lavoie to spill into the press with Landry, describing the confidence between the parties as "practically nil"³⁶⁴.

A Native of Matane, Landry, 64-years-old when I met him, owned and operated a regional telecommunications and media company and described himself as a believing Catholic, with lapsed practice, but for whom religion retained strong familial, cultural and national significations, which remain a fundamental aspect of his identity as a francophone Quebecker. Like many of Rimouski's cultural Catholics, Landry, who paid his tithe and contributed to the Parish, despite not attending Mass regularly, did not like the idea of being presented a *fait accompli* by an *ad hoc* committee.

Neither did churchwarden Jean-Marc Lavoie, who served on the Parish Council for the past 20 years. He explained in an open letter that he never expected his support for the cathedral would

³⁶³ See Paul Huot, « La cathédrale de Rimouski ne sera pas transformé en complexe culturel », *Radio-Canada*, June 16, 2016, (web) consulted January 2, 2021, <https://ici.radio-canada.ca/nouvelle/787858/cathedrale-rimouski-coop-paradis-culturel-culte-comite-1862-2016>.

³⁶⁴ See « Le purgatoire pour le dernier projet de sauvegarde de la Cathédrale », *Ici Bas-Saint-Laurent*, July 5, 2016, (web), consulted March 16, 2021, <https://ici.radio-canada.ca/nouvelle/791159/cathedrale-projet-sauvegarde-comite-contestation>.

make him a pariah on the Parish Council and that other members would ask him to resign after they learned he attended a meeting hosted by Committee Cathedral 2016. Lavoie criticised the Parish Council for having explicitly created a committee with a mandate to transform the cathedral and without first seeking to preserve its religious vocation, and chastised clergy and administrators for their fatalism; “the wish to preserve the cathedral is not a matter of nostalgia. On the contrary, it is based on a vision of the future. It is important to remember that the Church is not yet dead”³⁶⁵.

By summer’s end, Mgr. Grondin announced to an assembly of 600 Rimouskois that he had determined the best way to reconcile the Parish Council and Committee Cathedral 2016’s opposition was to create an autonomous corporation, part civil and part ecclesiastical, which would remove the cathedral from Parish responsibility and which would preserve the building’s cultural and religious vocations, indicating that the Archdiocese and Committee Cathedral 2016 were discussing how to immediately begin work to assure a 2017 re-opening (the diocese’s 150th anniversary)³⁶⁶.

Within less than 48 hours following the archbishop’s announcement, two leading entrepreneurs³⁶⁷, who offered to help finance the restoration, resigned from Committee 2016 citing the unfeasibility of separating the cathedral from Parish revenues and capital contributions³⁶⁸. Committee Cathedral 2016 had proposed the Archdiocese contribute at least the \$1.5 million it would cost to demolish

³⁶⁵ See Jean-Marc Lavoie « Préserver la vocation première de la Cathédrale », *L’Avantage, Votre journal*, July 8, 2016, (web), consulted September 18, 2017, <https://www.lavantage.qc.ca/article/2016/7/8/preserver-la-vocation-premiere-de-la-cat-4581988>, original, « le souhait de conserver la cathédrale ne relève pas de la nostalgie. Bien au contraire, il se fonde sur une vision d’avenir. Faut-il rappeler que l’Église n’est pas morte? ».

³⁶⁶ See Julie Tremblay, « Plus de 600 personnes réunies pour l’avenir de la cathédrale », *Ici Radio-Canada – Est du Québec*, September 7, 2016, (web), consulted March 16, 2021, <https://ici.radio-canada.ca/nouvelle/801455/cathedrale-rimouski-avenir-assemblee-publique>.

³⁶⁷ Marc Pigeon, owner of construction company Technipro, and André Collins of the firm Structure GB.

³⁶⁸ See Daniel Leduc, « Restauration de la cathédrale de Rimouski : deux démissionnaires dénoncent sa ‘non viabilité’ », *Ici Radio-Canada – Est du Québec*, September 9, 2016, (web), consulted March 16, 2021, <https://ici.radio-canada.ca/nouvelle/802209/restauration-cathedrale-rimouski-projet-fosse-creuse>.

the cathedral, as well as the proceeds of the sale of Saint-Pie-X, the rectory, and parking lot³⁶⁹. Landry agreed with the entrepreneurs and blamed the nonviable proposal on the local *curia*, who refused to use funds from its various foundations³⁷⁰ to contribute to restoring the cathedral.

Initially moved to pronounce on the cathedral's fate during the Committee 1862 - Committee 2016 collaboration with Mgr. Grondin, prolific local essayist, Gilles Le Chasseur, 82-years-old in 2020, Rimouski native and retired social worker, who worked in Saguenay and Lanaudière, urged residents to rally behind local leaders so that work on the cathedral could begin as soon as possible, underlining that, morally, the cathedral is the property of all residents³⁷¹. After attending Mgr. Grondin's announcement, even though he continued publicly supporting the archbishop, Le Chasseur warned him about his new entourage, notably treasurer Michel Lavoie and Chancellor Yves-Marie Mélançon:

All that is needed is for the bishop to be more assertive and consult with parishioners. Let him change the culture of the archdiocese and hold the reins of the steed that Pope Francis has entrusted to him. What is needed is not an information meeting to announce a decision made behind closed doors, like he had last September 7 ... but a real Parish Assembly where the bishop would have submitted a formal motion that called for a frank discussion followed by a democratic vote by secret ballot³⁷².

Apart from his enthusiasm for Art and History, for Le Chasseur, it was the cathedral's Casavant organ which created the most urgency for retaining the cathedral's original vocation because any

³⁶⁹ See Adeline Mantyk, « La balle est dans le camp du Diocèse et de la Fabrique », *L'Avantage, Votre journal*, 21(15), p.15.

³⁷⁰ Valued at \$33 million in 2020.

³⁷¹ See Gilles Le Chasseur, « La Cathédrale, de la joie à l'inquiétude », *L'Avantage, Votre journal*, August 8, 2016.

³⁷² See Gilles Le Chasseur, « La réalité de 2016 commande aux paroissiens de revenir à la cathédrale », *L'Avantage, Votre journal*, September 23, 2016, (web), consulted September 18, 2017, <http://www.lavantage.qc.ca/opinion/2016/9/23/la-realite-de-2016-commande-aux-paroissiens-de-revenir-a-la-cathedrale.html>, original: « Il suffirait que l'évêque s'affirme davantage et consulte les paroissiens. Qu'il change la culture de l'évêché et tienne les rênes de la monture que François lui a confiée. Ce n'est pas une rencontre d'information, où on annonce une décision prise en vase clos, qu'il aurait fallu avoir le 7 septembre dernier ... mais une vraie Assemblée des paroissiens, où l'évêque aurait soumis une proposition appelant une véritable discussion suivie d'un vote démocratique à bulletin secret ».

alteration to the interior would ruin its sonority. Le Chasseur, like Mayor Forest, urged his readers to support closing and selling Saint-Pie-X and Saint-Robert and dedicating those proceeds to the restoration of the cathedral, which he regretted, was “abominated” by the 1967 renovations. If more funds were needed, Le Chasseur declared, more than enough sits in the archdiocesan foundations (one of which he emphasises, morally belongs to all Rimouskois, as it originated from the sale of the diocesan classical college to the province during the 1960s, and was thus doubly paid for by residents). Lastly, Le Chasseur called on the new archbishop to create transparency, explaining that there was already widespread mistrust and perceptions of mismanagement among parishioners, who might be better inclined to contribute given more openness.

Le Chasseur’s opinion seemed to be widely respected. Journalists often based articles on his essays and letters, as if they were events themselves in the cathedral saga³⁷³ and he won a national prize for his communication of the cathedral story, one in which he declared his Act of Apostasy³⁷⁴. He styled himself as more of a critical witness than a man of action, “I am more of an observer, an historian, a simple citizen, but who remains attentive to the affairs of the City, as Socrates would say. So, when things do not work well, it is necessary to say so based on the principle of dialogue”³⁷⁵. As such he felt a responsibility to pronounce on contentious issues and to denounce egregious breaches of his interpretation of the social contract.

³⁷³ See Pierre Michaud, « Abandonner les autres églises au profit de la cathédrale », *L’Avantage, Votre journal*, 21(17), September 28, 2016, p. 4.

³⁷⁴ M. Le Chasseur announces his Act of Apostasy, denouncing the Church’s authoritarianism, misogyny, child abuse, forced celibacy, financial privilege, and fraud. The archdiocese’s behaviour was the straw that broke the camel’s back for Le Chasseur. Moving forward he promised to be guided by the golden rule to love one another. See Gilles Le Chasseur, « Le scandale et la honte ont une cathédrale », *L’Avantage, Votre journal*, November 11, 2019, (web), consulted April 8, 2020, <https://www.lavantage.qc.ca/article/2019/11/11/le-scandale-et-la-honte-ont-une-cathedrale>

³⁷⁵ See interview with Gilles Le Chasseur by Ryan Lux, February 3, 2020, 9:30 mins, original: « *J’occupe plutôt un rôle d’observateur, d’historien du dimanche, de simple citoyen, mais qui reste attentif d’affaires de la Cité, comme dirait Socrate, donc quand les choses ne marchent pas bien, il faut le dire en partant du principe du dialogue* ».

In 2016, Le Chasseur still practised his faith but attended Mass less frequently than when he was younger. An enthusiast of Vatican II democratisation (if not the liturgy and architecture), Le Chasseur was active within the newly empowered Church laity during the Quiet Revolution. Whatever faith he had left in the institution in 2016 was gone by the time he presented his Act of Apostasy to Mgr. Grondin in 2020, calling his administration's "appalling behaviour ... the straw that broke the camel's back"³⁷⁶.

4. *Usurpation and Revolt*

The relationship between the Parish Council, led by Normand Lavoie, and Committee Cathedral 2016, headed by Jacques Landry, continued to deteriorate as the pair continued striving to have the final word in the local and national press. First Landry launched a petition to demonstrate his widespread public support and to press the archbishop to create the civil-ecclesiastical corporation he had promised to manage the cathedral. The petition was meant to underscore the different degrees of support behind Committee Cathedral 2016 versus the portion of actively practising Catholics who followed the Parish Council: "It seems to me now evident that the issue of the cathedral does not concern only practising Catholics, but all Rimouskois, the great majority of whom cherish this built heritage"³⁷⁷. Landry demanded that the Parish Council hold a public meeting directed at the wider public to hear from less practising, but not less interested Catholics. His demands were ignored, Landry and his committee threatened the Parish Council and Archdiocese with a lawsuit if they did not a), hold a public consultation; b), resign *en masse* if they

³⁷⁶ *Idem*, 40 :00 mins, original: « la goutte qui a fait déborder la vase », and Gilles Le Chasseur, « Le scandale et la honte ont une cathédrale », *Le Mouton noir*, January 26, 2020, p. 1,3.

³⁷⁷ See Pierre Michaud, « Cathédrale 2016 tend la main à la Fabrique », *L'Avantage, Votre journal*, 21(18), October 5, 2016, p. 6, original: « Il me semble que les preuves sont maintenant faites que l'enjeu de la cathédrale ne concerne pas que les catholiques pratiquants, mais tous les Rimouskois qui tiennent en grande majorité à ce patrimoine bâti ».

refused to hold consultations; or c), remove Lavoie³⁷⁸. In the meantime, Committee Cathedral 2016 gained several new high-profile supporters, including the City, National Assembly deputy Harold Lebel, former Cégep de Rimouski director general Fernand Dionne and prominent local oncologist Georges Lévesque, not to mention 600 signatures in the space of two weeks³⁷⁹.

By the end of the month, silence continued to reign, leading Landry to demand Mgr. Grondin conclude the cathedral's transfer from Parish management to the new corporation, or otherwise to immediately transfer control of the cathedral to his committee:

Is something fishy? We already have a registered and functioning non-profit organisation. Are they afraid we're asking too many questions? Do they just want to transfer the cathedral, without any other assets, to this new corporation, which would then be doomed to bankruptcy, according to most observers? ³⁸⁰.

Landry explains that developments during the autumn of 2016 were as equally disappointing, as they were shocking.

He told me, The Parish Council is not going to save the cathedral. He said, it's very difficult to deal with them. They want nothing to do with it, and I had difficulty believing that a bishop would let go of his cathedral. I think that this guy, I am not a psychologist, but I think that he had a career path to follow, but it was clear he was never put in a position of decision before and that's why he is dragging his feet. But for him it must be terrible because he can't make a decision, and everyone is talking about it and then he is completely trapped. What's going to happen is that if he doesn't make a decision, he'll be sent back to Quebec City³⁸¹.

³⁷⁸ See Julie Tremblay, « Le comité Cathédrale 2016 menace de poursuivre la Fabrique Saint-Germain », *Ici Radio-Canada – Est du Québec*, October 13, 2016, (web), consulted March 16, 2021, <http://ici.radio-canada.ca/regions/est-Québec/2016/10/13/004-cathedrale-2016-rimouski-fabrique-archeve-mgr.grondin.shtml>.

³⁷⁹ See Pierre Michaud « Front commun contre les administrateurs de la Fabrique », *L'Avantage, Votre journal*, 21(20), October 19, 2016, p. 6.

³⁸⁰ See Pierre Michaud, « Jacques Landry demande la prise en charge immédiate de la cathédrale », *L'Avantage, Votre journal*, 21(21), October 26, 2016, p. 7, original: « *Est-ce qu'il y a anguille sous roche? Nous avons déjà un organisme à but non lucratif enregistré et fonctionnel. Est-ce qu'on a peur que nous posions trop de questions? Est-ce qu'on ne veut que transférer la cathédrale sans autre actif, dans cette nouvelle corporation qui serait alors vouée à la faillite selon la plupart des observateurs?* ».

³⁸¹ See Interview with Jacques Landry by Ryan Lux, February 7, 2020, 1:00 mins, original: « *Il m'a dit, l'archevêché ne va pas sauver la cathédrale. Il dit, c'est très difficile à opérer là-dedans. Il ne veut rien savoir et j'avais un peu de misère à croire ça, qu'un évêque laissait tomber sa cathédrale. Je pense que ce gars-là, je ne suis pas psychologue,*

As Committee 2016 was losing patience to begin work on the cathedral, Mgr. Grondin was having a difficult time trying to find someone willing to chair the transfer, much less lead the new fiduciary organisation³⁸². After everyone he asked refused, Mgr. Grondin ended his nearly two-month-silence, announcing publicly that he would take a more direct role in the process, that no longer would it be driven by any individual or committee but rather by the whole community. He promised a wider consultation process but, otherwise, his position had not changed since September, adding that if anyone was interested in the position, to please contact the Archdiocese³⁸³. Reaching an impasse, Landry switched tack and looked to the upcoming Parish Council elections as a possible solution.

In Quebec, civil aspects of the Catholic Church, such as governance, finances, and liabilities, are governed by *La loi des Fabriques* (Parish Law)³⁸⁴. The law stipulates that every parish should be administered by six *marguilliers* or churchwardens, who each serve terms of three years, meaning that every year two new positions are open to election. Furthermore, individual wardens can only serve two consecutive terms, though they are eligible for re-election after a one-term absence. During 2015, only one warden supported the cathedral, while the five other wardens of the fused parish pursued the interests of the local communities they represented and thus supported alleviating the Parish of the cathedral.

mais je pense qu'il y avait un chemin à tracer, mais c'était clair qu'il n'a jamais été mis dans une position de décision et pour ça il a entraîné dans ce ligne-là. Mais, pour lui, ça doit être terrible, parce qu'il ne prend pas de décision et tout le monde en parle, puis, il est piégé complètement. C'est ça qui va arriver ici, s'il ne prend pas de décision, on va le renvoyer à Québec ».

³⁸² See Pierre Michaud, « Le greffier Doucet a refusé l'offre de Mgr. Grondin », *L'Avantage, Votre journal*, 21(21), October 2016, p. 3.

³⁸³ See Pierre Michaud, « Mgr. Grondin a la ferme intention de sauver la cathédrale », *L'Avantage, Votre journal*, 21(22), November 2, 2016, p. 8.

³⁸⁴ Last updated in 1966, following the conclusion of Vatican II and anticipating the apogee of the Quiet Revolution, though its critics consider it medieval.

Given his ability to mobilise and the fact that virtually every adult Rimouskois was eligible to vote, Landry went to work to elect two wardens who were public supporters of restoring the cathedral at the expense of closing the city's post-war churches, which many non-churchgoers consider to be branch offices, built to meet temporarily high demand. He convinced Jean-Charles Lechasseur and Nathalie Leblond to stand for election. That accomplished, Landry needed to attract enough voters to defeat the two dozen parishioners who usually participate in the election and who would likely support anti-cathedral candidates. More than 120 parishioners cast ballots on November 27, 2016 – many for the first time – the majority of which supported Lechasseur and Leblond³⁸⁵. Owing to a resignation, a third election took place on December 11, 2016, where once again Landry's pro-cathedral candidate won the majority of 114 votes, meaning that in the new year, half of the parish wardens would support Committee 2016's vision³⁸⁶.

³⁸⁵ See Paul Huot, « L'élection de deux nouveaux marguilliers changera-t-elle l'avenir de la cathédrale », *Ici Bas-Saint-Laurent*, November 28, 2016, (web), consulted April 8, 2021, <https://ici.radio-canada.ca/nouvelle/1002570/cathedrale-rimouski-fabrique-saint-germain-avenir>.

³⁸⁶ See Paul Huot, « Exclue de l'assemblée de fabrique à cause de leur position sur la cathédrale de Rimouski? », *Ici Radio-Canada*, January 31, 2017, (web), consulted April 8, 2021, <https://ici.radio-canada.ca/nouvelle/1014156/marguilliers-fabrique-st-germain-rimouski-cathedrale-eveque#:~:text=Deux%20des%20trois%20marguilliers%20qui,v%C3%A9ritable%20motif%20de%20leur%20exclusion>.

D. January 2017 – April 19, 2018: Mutual Manoeuvring

This third instalment of the cathedral saga is characterised by three moments. First the Archdiocese seeks to overturn the elections of all three pro-cathedral wardens. Second, the Archdiocese commissions a third party to conduct professional public consultations. Third, both sides use the consultation results to justify conducting a series of manoeuvres in the political and ecclesiastical domains, doggedly pursuing their respective, and duly entrenched, objectives.

1. *The Gift of the Trojan Horse*

When the new Parish Council first met on January 19, 2017, Chancellor Yves-Marie Mélançon was present to greet the newly elected members and to inform two of them, Victor Lepage and Jean-Charles Lechasseur, that their elections were invalid, citing in the case of Lepage the absence of Norman Lavoie to preside over the election. With respect to Le Chasseur, the Archdiocese deemed he was a parish employee and thus ineligible to serve, pointing to his occasional role as an officiant at funerals and baptisms³⁸⁷. The third new warden, Nathalie Leblond, as the cathedral's organist, was warned that, due to her "interest, distinct from other parishioners" in the cathedral, she would have to abstain herself from any of its consideration by the council³⁸⁸.

Lepage likened the experience to appearing before a tribunal of the inquisition: "I denounce the interrogation I underwent during my first assembly in order to validate my association's allegiances or affiliations with the Committee Cathedral 2016 of which I am not even a

³⁸⁷ See « Deux marguilliers dénoncent leur exclusion du Conseil de Fabrique », *L'Avantage, Votre journal*, February 1, 2017, (web), consulted April 8, 2021, <https://www.lavantage.qc.ca/article/2017/02/01/deux-marguilliers-denoncent-leur-exclusion-du-conseil-de-fabrique>.

³⁸⁸ See Adeline Mantyk, « Mises en demeure et plaintes dans le diocèse de Rimouski », *L'Avantage, Votre journal*, 21(38), February 22, 2017, p. 8.

member”³⁸⁹. In response, former police chief and Committee Cathedral 2016 member. Jean-Claude Roy officially requested the Quebec Bar Association to investigate the chancellor for surpassing the legal limits of his civil function. In similar fashion, each of the three wardens filed a formal legal notice contesting the decisions, hoping to expedite their reinstatement. They denounced the chancellor’s behaviour as a stain which discredited the expectation of sound management ³⁹⁰, Abbé Pierre-Gingras, priest moderator of Saint-Jean-Baptiste in Quebec City, who also closed a monumental church and whom we will meet again in the next case, weighed in on the side of the excluded wardens, describing the chancellor’s arguments as weak and based upon technicalities. More importantly, Abbé Gingras found the spirit of the justifications most unsettling.

Given the difficulty we have in finding administrators, I think that we must welcome anyone who has the availability to offer themselves. In issues like this that deal with the closure, demolition or reopening and maintenance of a cathedral, I think we should try not to divide, but to unite these forces to have as many experiences and opinions as possible³⁹¹.

Abbé Gingras’ incredulity is palpable. Consider that Lechasseur had been a deeply involved parishioner since 1978, presiding the liturgy committee, serving multiple bishops, officiating ceremonies, and finally standing for election as a warden, never having crossed the Parish Council.

³⁸⁹ See « Deux marguilliers dénoncent leur exclusion du Conseil de Fabrique », 2017, *Op. Cit.*, original: « *Je dénonce l'interrogatoire subi lors de ma première assemblée, afin de valider mes liens, allégeances et/ou accointances avec le Comité cathédrale 2016 dont je ne fais pas partie* ».

³⁹⁰ See « Des marguilliers mettent en demeure la Fabrique », *Ici Radio-Canada*, February 16, 2017, (web) consulted April 8, 2021, <https://ici.radio-canada.ca/nouvelle/1017369/marguilliers-mise-en-demeure-fabrique-saint-germain>, and Adeline Mantyk, « Mises en demeure et plaintes dans le diocèse de Rimouski », *L'Avantage, Votre journal*, 21(38), p. 8.

³⁹¹ See Laurence Gallant, « Exclusion de deux marguilliers : un abbé de Québec croit les arguments de l’archevêché injustifiés », *Ici Radio-Canada*, February 3, 2017, (web), consulted April 8, 2021, <https://ici.radio-canada.ca/nouvelle/1014714/marguilliers-exclus-fabrique-st-germain-Québec-cathedrale#:~:text=L'abb%C3%A9%20Pierre%20Gingras%2C%20cur%C3%A9,chancelier%20du%20dioc%C3%A8se%20de%20Rimouski.&text=Peu%20importe%20qui%20est%20en,sont%20les%20paroissiens%20qui%20d%C3%A9cident>, original: « *À la difficulté que nous avons de trouver des administrateurs, je pense que les gens qui ont la disponibilité pour se présenter, il faut les accueillir. Dans les dossiers comme ça qui regardent la fermeture, la démolition ou la réouverture et l'entretien d'une cathédrale, je pense qu'il faut chercher non pas à diviser, mais à unir ces forces pour avoir le plus d'expériences et d'opinions autour de ça* ».

It beggars belief, after all his service, why he was barred from his seat on the Parish Council. Lechasseur went to see Mgr. Grondin to impress upon him the absurdity of the situation, unable to accept that the bishop would knowingly conduct himself thusly; nevertheless, he was rebuffed³⁹².

The election also upset parishioners who were accustomed to the conventional way of electing churchwardens, which was more by priest nomination. The priest would typically identify engaged laypeople, one or two from each former parish, and ask them to run almost always unopposed. The acceptance of the nomination was viewed as an obligatory service and prestige for congregation members of a certain social standing. When it comes time for the election itself, usually the bare minimum for quorum would acclaim candidates. This time, Committee 2016's political machine took advantage of the parish fusion, which deterritorialized voting, even though previous conventions had hitherto prevailed for the previous decade. Lechasseur learned from speaking to parishioners in his local community of Saint-Robert/Sainte-Odile that they

would not welcome me. They say that 'he is a defector! He's here for the cathedral! He stands for the cathedral! He will not come to our defence! He will defend the cathedral!' They never understood me well³⁹³.

Gilles Le Chasseur³⁹⁴ put his pen to paper to defend the newly elected-by-slate wardens. His deep sense of justice, injured by the activities at the archbishop's palace, Le Chasseur, took it upon himself to speak publicly for Rimouski's vast constituency of non-practising-but-interested, or Cultural Catholics. He wrote that the results of both elections were unanimous, or nearly, and

³⁹² See Interview with Jean-Charles Lechasseur by Ryan Lux February 7, 2020, 1:00:00 mins.

³⁹³ *Idem.*, 42:30 mins., original: « *Ils ne m'accueilleront pas. On va dire que c'est une transfuge ce qui vient parce qu'il est pour la cathédrale, il présente pour la cathédrale. Il ne viendra pour me défendre, il va défendre la cathédrale. Ils ne m'ont jamais bien compris* ».

³⁹⁴ Of no relation to Jean-Charles Lechasseur.

invited Rimouskois to question what the chancellor's decision indicated about the Archdiocese's political orientations:

Are we in a democracy, or are we in a dictatorship, or rather, a theocratic atmosphere where only the supreme leader is right, where everyone has to bow down in silence at the risk of disappearing? We are no longer in the days of the Inquisition, when the great possessors of truth controlled the lives of those who did not think like them; we need only think of Galileo, Joan of Arc or Giordano Bruno, who were silenced by the dungeon or the stake³⁹⁵.

By the end of February, Leblond and Lechasseur were reinstated following further investigation by Michel Lavoie, who refused, however, to budge on the legality of Lepage's election. But, out of solidarity, they refused to take their seats until Lepage could join them³⁹⁶. Mgr. Grondin granted treasurer Michel Lavoie "observer status with the right to intervene in discussions" to ensure "decorum", as well as to assure the new wardens worked within the Parish Law³⁹⁷. In mid-April 2017, Lepage's lawyer presented his argument to the Archdiocese, leaving it 30 days to prove the election's illegality before a Superior Court³⁹⁸. But even as the Archdiocese was stuck in the mire with its own Parish Council, the archbishop was preparing an exercise in healing. An obvious strategic reconsideration allowed for an about-turn and Lepage could take his seat.

2. Public Consultations: Summer and Autumn 2017

³⁹⁵ See Gilles Le Chasseur, « Vox populi vox dei », *Le Soleil*, February 27, 2017, (web), consulted May 21, 2021, <https://www.lesoleil.com/opinions/point-de-vue/cathedrale-de-rimouski-vox-populi-vox-dei-6a7d9c594c4ce7ebb672fd92e280340a>, original: « Sommes-nous en démocratie ou, sommes-nous dans une dictature ou dans des relents de théocratie où seul le chef suprême avait raison, où tout le monde devait courber l'échine en silence au risque de disparaître. Nous ne sommes plus au temps de l'inquisition où les grands possesseurs de la vérité disposaient de la vie des personnes qui ne pensaient pas comme eux; qu'il suffise de penser à Galilée, à Jeanne d'Arc ou à Giordano Bruno, qui furent réduits au silence par le cachot ou par le bûcher ».

³⁹⁶ See Ariane Perron-Langlois, « Deux marguilliers quittent une assemblée de la Fabrique pour protester », *Ici Bas-Saint-Laurent*, March 16, 2017, (web), consulted April 8, 2017, <https://ici.radio-canada.ca/nouvelle/1022663/marguilliers-quittent-assemblee-fabrique-cathedrale-rimouski>.

³⁹⁷ See « Fabrique Saint-Germain: un marguillier admis aux assemblées de fabrique », *L'Avantage, Votre journal*, February 24, 2017, (web), consulted April 8, 2021, <https://www.lavantage.qc.ca/article/2017/02/24/fabrique-saint-germain---un-marguillier-admis-aux-assemblees-de-.html>.

³⁹⁸ See Adeline Mantyk, « Victor Lepage est marguillier, selon un avis juridique », *L'Avantage, Votre journal*, 21(46), April 19, 2017, p. 4.

When Mgr. Grondin announced that public consultations would take place throughout the Spring. He wished he “could hear from people who don't usually speak. There will be a common vision if everyone is willing to give and share and not criticise from the bleachers, all the while warning that he expected discussion to remain convivial³⁹⁹. More details emerged later that Spring: consultations would take place between April 25 and June 3, 2017, when briefs would be presented and questions could be posed. Mgr. Grondin also announced that local Cégep professor of History and experienced regional development officer Kurt Vignola, 49-years-old in 2020, was mandated to coordinate the upcoming consultations. Vignola, of Rimouski, would work with Léger Polling to develop a telephone survey of 400 households, as well as analyse the briefs and presentations to draft a final report for the archbishop⁴⁰⁰.

Kurt Vignola's *curriculum vitae* was tailor-made for the position. He earned his bachelor's in history and his master's degree was in regional and territorial development. He was a professor of History at the local Cégep, and like Gagnon, would bring his students to the cathedral to animate course material. Vignola also co-directed a scholarly book dedicated to various aspects of the cathedral's history published in 2017⁴⁰¹. From a practical perspective, Vignola had years of experience working as a regional development officer, which required standard community relations practices.

Timing was also propitious. Once the book was finished, Vignola felt freer to participate in the closure, not to mention the fact that, by avoiding participating until 2017, Vignola was not yet

³⁹⁹ See Adeline Mantyk, « L'archevêque souhaite un ralliement autour de la Cathédrale », *L'Avantage, Votre journal*, 21(39), March 1, 2017, p. 7.

⁴⁰⁰ See Mgr. Denis Grondin, « Communiqué », Archdiocese of Rimouski, April 25, 2017, (web), consulted April 8, 2021, http://www.diocesisrimouski.com/consultation/conference_presse2017-04-25.pdf.

⁴⁰¹ See Jean-René Thuot, Kurt Vignola, & Nicolas Beaudry (dirs.), *La cathédrale de Rimouski : Parcours, mémoires, récits*, Rimouski, L'Estuaire, 2017.

identified with a group or position, which lent him credible neutrality. What had begun as a scientific interest in documenting the cathedral “before it was too late” transformed into a community engagement issue.

I was upset that the community was shrugging it off. Heritage is important, but it is also an indicator of what kind of a community we are. A community that is not able to take charge of their heritage is like someone who doesn't clean their house. The message it gives me is a community with no strength, which is disinterested⁴⁰².

Even though Vignola is not a practising Catholic, he qualifies himself as a believer and would have preferred the cathedral to retain its religious vocation. He explained that Quebec's churches are an integral component of national identity.

Identity is not an accident. We are part of a sequence of events. Religious heritage is an important component of all this because Quebec has been religious for a long time. Even if people don't practise as much anymore, there are many more who are believers than churchgoers⁴⁰³.

In the political arena, the public consultations would be the new mayor, Marc Parent's, first major official foray into the cathedral debate. Parent, Rimouski-native and 59-years-old in 2020, was nominated mayor by his colleagues on the municipal council on December 15, 2016, when long-time mayor Éric Forest, was appointed to the Canadian Senate. Via his presentation of the City's brief, prepared by City staff, Parent, a retired RCMP officer, would have to, for the first time as mayor, reluctantly take a position on a divisive issue which was not a natural fit for a politician more interested in sports, recreation, and business development. “I was forced to get involved.

⁴⁰² See interview with Kurt Vignola by Ryan Lux, February 4, 2020, 33:00 mins, original: « *J'étais heurté du fait que la communauté ne le prenne pas, c'est important le patrimoine, mais c'est aussi un indicateur de ce qui est notre communauté. Une communauté qui n'est pas capable de prendre en main son patrimoine, c'est comme quelqu'un qui ne fait pas le ménage de sa maison. Le message qu'il m'a donné, c'est une communauté qui n'a rien de fort, qui est désintéressé* ».

⁴⁰³ *Idem.*, 52:00 mins., original, « *L'identité ce n'est pas un accident. On fait partie d'une suite d'événements qui se produisent. Le patrimoine religieux est une composante importante de tout cela, parce que le Québec était religieux longtemps. Même si les gens ne pratiquent plus, il y en a beaucoup plus qui sont croyants que pratiquants* ».

Everyone tends to put the responsibility on the City's shoulders but it's not a municipal responsibility. We got sucked into the vortex’’⁴⁰⁴. Parent is also among the least religious of the main protagonists in the cathedral saga, describing himself as a 1.5 on a scale of one to 10. Parent’s distinguishing characteristic is his interpretation of Bill 21, Québec’s secularism legislation, which he was the only one to believe prohibited municipal investment in religious projects, a narrower interpretation than his predecessor, who was more concerned with municipal involvement could be construed as favouritism by other religious groups or organisations. Both men preferred the option of the City regularising land titles and purchasing Saint-Pie-X with the proceeds to be used by the Parish or Archdiocese to restore the cathedral. In fact, before the survey was designed, Parent urged the Archdiocese to include questions not just about the cathedral but to also pose questions in relation to the Parish’s entire real estate portfolio⁴⁰⁵. Nevertheless, anticipating consultations, he told reporters he was happy that they would allow residents to *silently* express themselves’’⁴⁰⁶.

3. *Renewed Urgency*

Consultations took on new urgency during the spring as the building, abandoned for more than two years, continued to deteriorate. One of the cathedral’s water sprinklers burst in late March, creating water damage⁴⁰⁷. Frustrated, Landry and committee members packed a city council

⁴⁰⁴ See interview with Marc Parent by Ryan Lux, February 4, 2020, 27:00 mins., original: « *J'étais attiré par force. Tout le monde tend à mettre la responsabilité sur les épaules de la ville, mais ce n'est pas une responsabilité municipale. On a été aspiré dans le tourbillon* ».

⁴⁰⁵ See Adeline Mantyk, « Le maire de Rimouski souhaite une consultation publique élargie », *L'Avantage, Votre journal*, 21(41), March 15, 2017, p. 8.

⁴⁰⁶ See Adeline Melnyk, « La Fabrique et la ville accueillent favorablement la consultation publique », *L'Avantage, Votre journal*, 21(48), May 3, 2017, p. 5.

⁴⁰⁷ See Johanne Fournier, « Nouvelle tuile pour la cathédrale de Rimouski », *Le Soleil*, March 21, 2017, (web), consulted April 8, 2021, <https://www.lesoleil.com/actualite/en-region/nouvelle-tuile-pourlacathedrale-derimouski-29b88fbc44770e018f5ce8d4897ebc3e>.

meeting demanding the municipality intervene before an emergency occurred⁴⁰⁸. Afterwards, the Parish revealed that the cathedral had not been insured for more than a month due to dramatically increased insurance premiums⁴⁰⁹. In response, using municipal safety measures, Parent ordered the Parish to re-evaluate the building's structural integrity and to remediate the fire alarm system⁴¹⁰.

4. *Vox Populi: Léger Survey*

The telephone survey, carried out between April 26 and May 3, 2017 was designed to discern both Rimouskois' degree of attachment to the cathedral and what they were prepared to sacrifice to preserve it⁴¹¹. It also presented five scenarios for the cathedral's future use and asked participants to assess the social acceptability of each: 1), Demolishment; 2), Remain exclusively a place of worship; 3), Transformation, primarily religious with some civic uses; 4), Transformation, primarily civic with some religious uses; 5), Transformation, exclusively civic uses with no religion at all⁴¹².

Results demonstrated four strong tendencies: 1), Rimouskois were at least moderately attached to the cathedral (62 per cent); 2), Residents wanted the cathedral to remain part of the landscape (94 per cent); 3), Rimouskois were open to new uses but not all (77 per cent); 4.) Most wanted the

⁴⁰⁸ See Edith Drouin, « La Cathédrale de Rimouski : des citoyens demandent à la Ville d'intervenir », *Ici Radio-Canada*, March 21, 2017, (web), consulted April 8, 2021, <https://ici.radio-canada.ca/nouvelle/1023436/citoyens-intervention-ville-rimouski-cathedrale-saint-germain-conseil-municipal>.

⁴⁰⁹ See Paul Huot, « La cathédrale Saint-Germain n'est plus assurée contre les sinistres », *Ici Bas-Saint-Laurent*, March 31, 2017, <https://ici.radio-canada.ca/nouvelle/1025575/cathedrale-saint-germain-rimouski-sinistre-assurance>.

⁴¹⁰ See Adeline Mantyk, « La Ville demande une évaluation de la structure », *L'Avantage, Votre journal*, 21(47), p. 11.

⁴¹¹ See Julie Tremblay, « Les consultations sur l'avenir de la cathédrale sont lancées », April 25, 2017, (web), consulted April 8, 2021, <https://ici.radio-canada.ca/nouvelle/1030059/les-consultations-sur-lavenir-de-la-cathedrale-sont-lancees#:~:text=Plus%20de%20deux%20ans%20apr%C3%A8s,avenir%20viennent%20d%C3%AAtre%20lanc%C3%A9s.&text=Les%20consultations%20se%20tiendront%20jusqu,se%20d%C3%A9rouleront%20en%20deux%20phases>.

⁴¹² See Adeline Mantyk, « Cinq scénarios possibles pour l'utilisation de la cathédrale », *L'Avantage, Votre journal*, 21(48), p. 5.

cathedral's interior (58 per cent at least partially, 27 per cent integrally)⁴¹³. The interpretation of the third finding proved to be the most contentious, with all parties using it to support their respective arguments. For example, the figure of 77 per cent “open to transformation” comprises the subgroups of a. multipurpose but primarily religious (33 per cent); b. multipurpose with some religious activities (25 per cent); and c. new usage, no religion (19 per cent). In a separate category, not included in the 77 per cent open to “some change”, another 17 per cent answered that they would like the cathedral to remain a place of worship, or, in other words, to retain the status quo. Reconfigured, partisans of the cathedral argue that 75 per cent of respondents wanted to keep the cathedral as a more than less religious building. In terms of which church participants wanted to keep as places of worship, the cathedral scored second only to the popular shrine to Sainte-Anne at Pointe-au-Père⁴¹⁴. With respect to acceptable future uses other than religious, community and cultural were the preferred vocations, with 83 and 80 per cent, respectively, expressing support for a future library or concert hall⁴¹⁵. Lastly, the results were very clear about how Rimouskois felt about financing any future project: unenthused. A plurality of respondents (35 per cent,) believed funds should come from the Archdiocese, while 21 per cent of participants thought the municipality should be the principal source of funding. Only 13 per cent thought that local fundraising should pay for the restoration⁴¹⁶.

5. *A Local Commission*

The second half of the consultation process took place on June 3, 2017, when for three hours around 40 people attended the public audiences, where they heard a dozen presentations of the 14

⁴¹³ See « L'avenir de la cathédrale Saint-Germain de Rimouski : Rapport d'analyse d'un sondage téléphonique auprès des Rimouskois », Léger, May 10, 2017, (web), consulted April 8, 2021.

http://www.diocesisrimouski.com/consultation/rapports/rapport_sondage_leger_%202017.pdf.

⁴¹⁴ *Idem.*, p. 10.

⁴¹⁵ *Idem.*, p. 16.

⁴¹⁶ *Idem.*, p. 21.

briefs submitted⁴¹⁷. Describing the event, Vignola focused on its egalitarian and non-conflictual atmosphere. All of the main constituents submitted and/or presented events, including Abbé Gérald Roy, the Parish Council, the Rimouski Heritage society, Pascal Gagnon, the City and Jacques Landry, with his newly rechristened Diocesan Coalition to Save Rimouski's Cathedral⁴¹⁸, but also several other proposals, including an "open air" cathedral (the ruins) incorporated into a large outdoor plaza, which piqued the interest of the Archdiocese for the obvious reason that it would absolve its obligation of restoring or demolishing its cathedral⁴¹⁹. Another approach was the one proposed by former heritage society President Pascal Gagnon's collaboration with the local branch of the National Archives, which was looking for more space and could present a long-term source of revenue as a complement for any future project. Lastly, the City used its brief to acknowledge that the cathedral's designation, as part of a heritage district, does oblige municipal contribution to future restorations, but limits it only to the exterior because the building itself is not heritage designated. Apart from that concession, Parent used his time to vigorously assert that he had no intention of absolving the Archdiocese and the Parish of their responsibilities. Otherwise, the presentations served more as formal submissions outlining previously held positions.

Vignola's final report considered three scenarios: 1), Significant transformation, primarily civic use; 2), Restoration, primarily religious; and 3), Demolition. Though he maintained the second scenario was most desirable from a heritage perspective, Vignola recommended pursuing scenario

⁴¹⁷ See Isabelle Damphouse, « Un rapport sur l'avenir de la cathédrale à la mi-juin », *Ici Bas-Saint-Laurent*, June 3, 2017, (web), consulted April 8, 2021, <https://ici.radio-canada.ca/nouvelle/1037686/avenir-cathedrale-rimouski-consultation-publique>.

⁴¹⁸ Regroupement diocésain pour la sauvegarde de la cathédrale de Rimouski.

⁴¹⁹ See « Communiqué de presse: projets pour l'avenir de la cathédrale de Rimouski », Archdiocese of Rimouski, October 16, 2017, (web), consulted April 8, 2021, http://www.dioceserimouski.com/consultation/communiqué_2017-10-16.pdf.

one, which he judged to be most viable in the long-term. In this scenario, 4/5 of the nave would remain open to preserve the organ's sonority. With respect to management, Vignola recommended a not-for-profit model but encouraged the Parish to co-manage or rent space for worship in the cathedral on a regular basis⁴²⁰. Moreover, financially, he insisted that the Archdiocese had a moral responsibility for the cathedral.

6. *Reaction to Consultations:*

Less than three weeks after hearing the consultations and one week after receiving Kurt Vignola's final report, the Archdiocese announced that it had reached a decision: to transform the cathedral and to exclude regular religious practice⁴²¹. Mgr. Denis Grondin defended his decision, framing it as him returning the heritage building to a population estranged from it because of its religious status:

[t]his place will allow the population to gather and be happy to frequent this significant place. We need people to enter and to want to come in. We need to get beyond the small core of churchgoers who used to come. The Cathedral was practically abandoned. It must be a place of life⁴²².

As such, the Archdiocese called for feasible, community and culturally oriented projects to be submitted within three months, hoping to complete the project within two years⁴²³.

⁴²⁰ See Kurt Vignola, « L'avenir de la cathédrale de Rimouski : Rapport de la consultation menée au printemps 2017 sur l'acceptabilité sociale des usages et des projets liés à l'avenir de la cathédrale de Rimouski », *Archdiocese of Rimouski*, June 19, 2017, p.21, (web), consulted April 8, 2021, https://www.academia.edu/36790740/Lavenir_de_la_cath%C3%A9drale_de_Rimouski.

⁴²¹ See « Le Diocèse de Rimouski privilégie la conversion de la Cathédrale », *L'Avantage, Votre journal*, June 27, 2017, (web), consulted April 8, 2021, <http://www.lavantage.qc.ca/actualites/2017/6/27/le-diocese-de-rimouski-privilegie-la-conversion-de-la-cathedrale.html>.

⁴²² See « 'On n'a plus de temps à perdre' – Mgr. Denis Grondin », *L'Avantage, Votre journal*, June 28, 2017, (web), consulted April 8, 2021, <https://www.lavantage.qc.ca/article/2017/06/28/--on-n-a-plus-de-temps-a-perdre-----mgr-denis-grondin>, original: « Cet endroit va permettre à la population de se rassembler et d'être contente de fréquenter ce lieu significatif. Il faut que les gens entrent et qu'ils aient le goût d'entrer. Il faut sortir du petit noyau de pratiquants qui venaient. La Cathédrale était pratiquement abandonnée. Elle doit être un lieu de vie ».

⁴²³ See Johanne Fournier, « La cathédrale de Rimouski ne sera plus un lieu de culte », *Le Soleil*, June 29, 2017, (web), consulted April 8, 2017, <https://www.lesoleil.com/actualite/en-region/la-cathedrale-de-rimouski-ne-seraplus-un-lieu-de-culte-d028e460e6451143a6b236b5eac1f49c>.

Mayor Marc Parent disagreed with the Archdiocese's interpretation of public consultations and walked away from the bishop's press conference with the impression that he was "throwing in the towel": "[t]he Archdiocese is mistaken in thinking that it has a promising project within the walls of the Cathedral without financial contribution from the City. There is no community organisation that is going to be able to put forward \$6 or \$7 million to bring the Cathedral to code"⁴²⁴. But in fact, he never intended to contribute. Parent worried that the Parish Council would be happy to hand over the cathedral to an organisation that would eventually go bankrupt and leave taxpayers with responsibility for the cathedral and demanded the Archdiocese create a \$4 million contingency fund in case no adequate project presented itself. Despite the City no longer being interested in taking part in any cathedral project, Parent reiterated the municipality's continued interest in purchasing the adjacent lands and rectory for \$1 million, emphasising its generosity by noting that at present they have virtually no market value because they are not zoned residentially or commercially⁴²⁵.

The Coalition's reaction to Mgr. Grondin's announcement was even more hostile, accusing him of having blocked any advancement and wilfully misconstruing the Léger poll⁴²⁶. Gilles Le Chasseur questioned the design and analysis of the poll altogether, wondering aloud if more people should have participated in its design and accused Mgr. Grondin and his entourage of gross

⁴²⁴ See Jean-Phillipe Langlois, « Les visions de l'Archevêché et de la Ville s'opposent », *L'Avantage, Votre journal*, 22(5), p. 4, original: « *L'Archevêché fait fausse route en pensant avoir un projet porteur à l'intérieur des murs de la Cathédrale sans contribution financière de la ville. Il n'y a pas d'organisme communautaire qui va pouvoir mettre de l'avant des sommes de 6 ou 7 millions \$ pour remettre à niveau au minimum la Cathédrale* ».

⁴²⁵ See « Rimouski fait une croix sur tout projet public dans la cathédrale », *Ici Radio-Canada – Bas-Saint-Laurent*, July 11, 2017, (web), consulted April 8, 2021, <https://ici.radio-canada.ca/nouvelle/1044662/cathedrale-rimouski-ville-presbytere-fabrique-paradis-bibliotheque#:~:text=La%20Ville%20de%20Rimouski%20%C3%A9carte,la%20restauration%20de%20l'%C3%A9glise>.

⁴²⁶ See Jean-Phillipe Langlois, « Jacques Landry critique vivement la position de Mgr. Grondin », *L'Avantage, Votre journal*, 22(05), July 5, 2017, p. 4.

incompetence⁴²⁷. A number of parishioners at large also wrote to the local newspaper expressing disbelief that the consultation process had done nothing to break the cathedral's Gordian knot. Perhaps as a result, both the Coalition and the Archdiocese spent the next 10 months pursuing a flurry of political and ecclesiastical skirmishes.

E. Manoeuvres and Perceptions of the Other: Autumn 2017-April 2018

1. *Political Tactics*

Among Rimouski's political circles, the cathedral was top of mind during the autumn municipal election campaign. Indeed, one could even argue that the cathedral question defined the race; each of the five candidates attached himself to the various competing positions on the cathedral, either out of pragmatism to benefit from existing political organisation or, conversely, via solicitation by the groups themselves. There was Gilles Thériault who aligned with Landry's position and who described the Archdiocese's actions very succinctly, calling it

an alarmist closure devoid of intuition, precipitated... by a dysfunctional Parish Council, and disregard for the parishioners expressed will, leaving us to defend the bishop's abandoned diocesan seat and a polarised debate on the financial obligations of its restoration and its maintenance⁴²⁸.

Another candidate, Frédéric Rioux's plan was also in Landry's wheelhouse, which was to use municipal safety laws to force the Parish to carry out the necessary work or face expropriation⁴²⁹.

Djanick Michaud took on Pascal Gagnon's project of attracting the National Archives to secure

⁴²⁷ See Gilles Le Chasseur, « Rimouski: désacralisée ou la cerise sur le gâteau », *Le Soleil*, July 5, 2017, (web), consulted September 18, 2017, <https://www.lesoleil.com/opinions/point-de-vue/rimouski-desacralisee-ou-la-cerise-sur-le-gateau-c9e85d8ac60f16e07286ed1485f9e245>.

⁴²⁸ See « Coopérative Paradis dans la Cathédrale : 'Une improvisation irresponsable' », *L'Avantage, Votre journal*, October 18, 2017, (web), consulted April 8, 2021, <https://www.lavantage.qc.ca/article/2017/10/18/cooperative-paradis-dans-la-cathedrale-----une-improvisation-irr>, original : « Une fermeture alarmiste dépourvue d'intuition, précipitée... par un conseil paroissial dysfonctionnel, et le mépris de la volonté exprimée par les paroissiens, nous laissant défendre le siège diocésain abandonné par l'évêque et un débat polarisé sur les obligations financières liées à sa restauration et à son entretien ».

⁴²⁹ See Adeline Mantyk, « Les cinq candidats à la maire se prononcent sur la cathédrale de Rimouski », *L'Avantage, Votre journal*, 22(20), October 16, 2017, p. 8.

external revenues and stable funding for the cathedral⁴³⁰. Alternatively, candidate Pierre Chassé preferred the Archdiocese's vision of a totally secular project like Committee 1862 or the new ruins, or open-air cathedral, advanced by Martine Dubé and Michel Francoeur (his later nomination for Parish Council president is evidence of the Archdiocese's interest in this approach)⁴³¹. Lastly, incumbent Marc Parent maintained his position was to pressure the Archdiocese to carry out the work, that the City could not invest in religion, and that most citizens wanted the cathedral to remain the principal church of the city and Archdiocese⁴³². Leading up to the election, however, only Parent affirmed that the cathedral question would be his priority if re-elected⁴³³. Based upon election results, the perennity of the cathedral was Rimouskois' priority for the mayoral race as well, giving 47.4 per cent of votes to Parent compared to distant second place Pierre Chassé's 33.9 per cent, whose stated priority was local sporting infrastructure⁴³⁴. Parent promised to immediately establish contact with the Archdiocese to push for a concrete plan in his victory statements.

2. *Ecclesiastical Tactics*

During the same period, on the ecclesiastical plane, we see a similar set of offensive volleys between the Archdiocese, the Diocesan Coalition to Save the Cathedral, and the Parish Council. With respect to its participation in the cathedral's restoration, the Archdiocese sent mixed messages and exhibited indecision throughout this period. For example, one might interpret the

⁴³⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴³¹ See « Développement dans le dossier de la Cathédrale de Rimouski », *L'Avantage, Votre journal*, July 11, 2019, (web), consulted November 6, 2024, <https://www.lelaurentien.ca/article/2019/07/11/developpement-dans-le-dossier-de-la-cathedrale-de-rimouski>.

⁴³² *Ibid.*

⁴³³ See Alix Villeneuve, « Les Rimouskois ont l'embarass du choix », *Le Journal de Québec*, November 4, 2017 p. 48.

⁴³⁴ See Adeline Mantyk, « Marc Parent élu : Priorité à la cathédrale », *L'Avantage, Votre journal*, 22(23), November 8, 2017, p. 1&3.

fact that, Mgr. Grondin promised for the first time to contribute to the cathedral's restoration in late October 2017 as progress. Only three weeks later, the Archdiocese's treasurer Michel Lavoie disseminated a press release emphasising that the regional ecclesiastical corporation was prohibited from using capital from its various foundations, though he later insisted his communiqué was simply an annual financial statement and had nothing to do with the cathedral⁴³⁵.

In terms of its progress on the cathedral project, since its call for proposals following the public consultations, the Archdiocese announced that no viable public projects had been received by the deadline, which they, in due course, extended indefinitely⁴³⁶. In mid-November Mgr. Grondin called a meeting with stakeholders, excluding Landry's coalition, which was the only group to submit a proposal before the deadline⁴³⁷. Those invited were Mayor Parent, MNA Harold Lebel, the Parish Council, and the Rimouski Heritage Society. At the meeting, Mgr. Grondin insisted upon desacralising the cathedral for any project to move forward⁴³⁸. However months later, by the end of January 2018, Mgr. Grondin was still not ready to pronounce on the subject, leaving observers to speculate that the Archbishop "probably has his eyes glued to the Parish, whose council is in transition ... now that the Diocesan Coalition to Save the Cathedral has a majority on the council"⁴³⁹, referencing the power struggle taking place since the autumn's bitter and

⁴³⁵ See Julie Tremblay, « Les 5 M\$ dans les coffres de l'Archevêché. Ne peuvent pas être utilisées pour la cathédrale », *Ici Radio-Canada – Bas-Saint-Laurent*, November 9, 2017, (web), consulted April 8, 2021, <https://ici.radio-canada.ca/nouvelle/1066257/cathedrale-rimouski-st-germain-archeveche-renovation>.

⁴³⁶ See « Aucun projet convenable pour la Cathédrale de Rimouski », *L'Avantage, Votre journal*, October 16, 2017, (web), consulted April 8, 2021, <https://www.lavantage.qc.ca/article/2017/10/16/aucun-projet-convenable-pour-la-cathedrale-de-rimouski--selon-la>.

⁴³⁷ See Adeline Mantyk, « Assemblée pour l'avenir de la cathédrale », *L'Avantage, Votre journal*, 22(4), November 15, 2017, p. 20.

⁴³⁸ See Xavier Lacroix, « Relance des discussions pour l'avenir de la cathédrale », *Ici Radio-Canada – Bas-Saint-Laurent*, November 27, 2017, (web), consulted April 8, 2021, <https://ici.radio-canada.ca/nouvelle/1069767/relance-discussions-avenir-cathedrale-rimouski>.

⁴³⁹ See « Mgr. Grondin n'est pas prêt », *L'Avantage, Votre journal*, January 24, 2018, (web), consulted April 8, 2021, <https://www.lavantage.qc.ca/article/2018/01/24/mgr-grondin-n-est-pas-pret>, original: « a probablement les yeux rivés sur le conseil paroissial, dont le conseil est en transition ... le Regroupement diocésain pour la sauvegarde de la cathédrale devrait être majoritaire au conseil ».

unprecedented Parish Council election waged by Landry's *Le Regroupement diocésain pour la sauvegarde de la cathédrale de Rimouski* (Diocesan Coalition to Save the Cathedral of Rimouski).

3. *Grassroots Civil Society Tactics*

During 2017, Landry's group waged their campaign within the Church on five fronts: 1), expanding diocese-wide; 2), appealing to higher levels of Church hierarchy to intervene ; 3), defending its proposal to the Archdiocese following the public consultations' call for proposals; 4), attempts to raise alarm over the organ; and 5), organising what amounts to a pro-cathedral party to stand for the Parish Council election in the hopes of taking the majority and thereby seizing decision-making power over the cathedral. Committee Cathedral 2016's name change was more than a simple exercise in rebranding. Rather, it reflected the group's decision to establish a coalition of people affected by church closures from across the diocese. Landry explained the decision came in part due to the multitude of people contacting him from outside of Rimouski, who shared his group's vision for religious heritage⁴⁴⁰. In response, the Archdiocese, notably while Mgr. Denis was in Rome, sent a letter to all its priests, which Landry describes as ordering them, "to denounce any request for contributions to finance the restoration of the cathedral. They were also asked to send a [Parish Council] resolution to Mgr. Grondin to express their opposition to any action by our group"⁴⁴¹. For his part, treasurer Lavoie minimised the letter, suggesting it was a response to widespread confusion about whether the Coalition was associated with the diocese and local parishes' concerns that Landry's efforts would divert contributions to their own churches.

⁴⁴⁰ See Adeline Mantyk, « Le Comité cathédrale 2016 s'élargit au diocèse », *L'Avantage, Votre journal*, 21(47), April 26, 2017, p. 11.

⁴⁴¹ See Adeline Mantyk, « Le Regroupement diocésain dénonce une tentative d'influence », *L'Avantage, Votre journal*, 21(52), p. 5., « original, à dénoncer toute demande de contribution pour le financement de la restauration de la cathédrale. Il leur est aussi demandé de transmettre à Mgr. Grondin une résolution pour manifester leur opposition à toute démarche de notre Regroupement ».

Lavoie further clarified that the letter only banned parishes from supporting the Coalition, and that individuals were free to decide for themselves⁴⁴².

Second, the Coalition decided to try insubordination by appealing to Rome to intervene. The group sought to capitalise on a visit to Rimouski by the Apostolic Nuncio Mgr. Luigi Bonazzi, the Pope's representative in Canada⁴⁴³. Following the dismissal of their proposal and the exclusion from further participation, Landry sent their plan to Mgr. Bonazzi contacted Roman newspaper *La Repubblica* and sent letters directly to the Vatican. Landry publicly speculated how Pope Francis would receive the news: "The big boss may have something to say. He might wonder how a group of citizens can be so willing, despite the pitfalls, to do work, to renovate a cathedral, to go out and get money, with options and *bone fide* budgets all valid"⁴⁴⁴.

Third, the Diocesan Coalition undertook efforts to defend the credibility of its proposal. First, Landry's group erected multiple signs contradicting the bishop's claims that Rimouskois supported desacralisation, pointing out that 75 per cent favoured retaining the cathedral's religious vocation⁴⁴⁵. Next, they sought to refute the diocese's dismissal of its project as "non-viable" by

⁴⁴² See Adeline Mantyk, « L'économe fait une mise au point », *L'Avantage, Votre journal*, 21(52), May 31, 2017, p. 5.

⁴⁴³ See Adeline Mantyk, « Le représentant du pape au Canada se rend à Rimouski », *L'Avantage, Votre journal*, 22(11), August 16, 2017, p. 5.

⁴⁴⁴ See « Jacques Landry et Cie passent par-dessus la tête de l'évêque », *L'Avantage, Votre journal*, November 29, 2017, (web), consulted April 8, 2021, <http://www.lavantage.qc.ca/actualites/societe/2017/11/29/jacques-landry-et-cie-passent-par-dessus-la-tete-de-leveque.html>, original: « Le grand patron aura peut-être quelque chose à dire. Il va peut-être se demander comment un groupe de citoyens peut vouloir autant, malgré les embûches, faire des travaux, rénover une cathédrale, aller chercher de l'argent, avec des options et des budgets pro forma tous valides ».

⁴⁴⁵ See Adeline Mantyk, « Les Rimouskois souhaitent le maintien du culte dans la cathédrale », *L'Avantage, Votre journal*, 22(11), August 16, 2017, p. 3.

assembling a group of professors and their management students at the Université du Québec à Rimouski to assess their proposal⁴⁴⁶.

Fourth, titular of the cathedral's organ, Josée April and urbanist Alain Tessier, members of the Diocesan Coalition, addressed media to remind the region's residents of the instrument's extreme rarity and cultural value to convince non-practising Catholics to preserve the cathedral's integral form and function. April highlighted the fact that since the cathedral's closure, the music conservatory has had no new students studying the organ, whereas the centre was once an important destination for these students. For his part Tessier emphasised the risk of interior modifications to the cathedral, which would render it effectively useless⁴⁴⁷. Meanwhile, Landry was looking to December 2017's Parish Council election to add two pro-cathedral voices to the three already sitting members to gain a majority of the seven votes (six elected wardens and one appointed president).

4. *Parish Council Tactics*

Since 2016's Parish Council election, which chose three pro-cathedral wardens, meetings had been tense or worse with three for and three against restoring the cathedral, with the anti-restoration President Norman Lavoie casting the deciding vote. Only months after the election when all three wardens were finally able to take their seats, the dynamic was so fraught that it allegedly came to physical blows during one meeting. Police were called but Jean-Charles Lechasseur declined to make a formal complaint, though multiple witnesses confirm his assertion that he was the victim

⁴⁴⁶ See « Un projet à l'étude pour sauvegarder la cathédrale de Rimouski », *Ici Radio-Canada – Bas-Saint-Laurent*, October 10, 2017, (web), consulted April 8, 2021, <https://ici.radio-canada.ca/nouvelle/1060619/cathedrale-saint-germain-sauvegarde-patrimoine-rimouski>.

⁴⁴⁷ See Josée April & Alain Tessier, « Une cathédrale laissée à l'abandon et qui réduit au silence l'un des plus grands orgues du Québec », *L'Avantage, Votre journal*, November 17, 2017, (web), <https://www.lavantage.qc.ca/article/2017/11/17/--une-cathedrale-laissee-a-labandon-et-qui-reduit-au-silence-lun>.

of an assault and battery. Nathalie Leblond accused the anti-restoration group of creating a “climate of suspicion, dictatorial control and misogynistic behaviour on the part of the president. The caustic, even cynical attitude of Mr. Gendron and Mr. Lavoie is mainly due to their desire to manage the Parish as their exclusive property”⁴⁴⁸. Thus, for both sides, the December election represented an opportunity to escape a frustrating council dynamic.

Along with the election, it is instructive to observe the Archdiocese’s response to it, its effects on public opinion, and on how it changed the Parish’s ability to act on the cathedral. Beginning with the election, only one out of three council seats were contested, between René Roy (anti-restoration) and ex-Bloc Québécois MP Jean-Yves Roy (pro-restoration), with the latter winning with 154 of 216 votes cast⁴⁴⁹. The two acclaimed wardens were Victor Lepage for his last year, and newcomer Albert Carré, who spent 45 years in construction. His priority was beginning work on the cathedral as soon as possible:

I don't want them to start destroying Rimouski, since I spent the last 45 years contributing to building this city... It is not a question of religion to want to save the cathedral; it is a question of heritage. Cathedral Avenue, we risk calling it the street of ruins before long⁴⁵⁰.

Lepage unsuccessfully lobbied for the new wardens to be able to assume their duties immediately given their moral authority, arguing that Jean-Louis Gendron’s resignation and the parish’s

⁴⁴⁸ See Johanne Fournier, « Une réunion de paroisse qui tourne mal à Rimouski », *Le Soleil*, October 1, 2017, (web), consulted April 8, 2021, <https://www.lesoleil.com/actualite/en-region/une-reunion-de-paroisse-qui-tourne-mal-a-rimouski-69523e0309149db2a412c3e0f0a527b0>, original: « climat de suspicion, d'un contrôle dictatorial et d'un comportement misogyne de la part du président. L'attitude caustique, voire cynique, qu'ont M. Gendron et M. Lavoie, est principalement due à ce désir de gérer la paroisse comme étant leur propriété exclusive ».

⁴⁴⁹ See Pierre Michaud, « Trois marguilliers rejoignent la Fabrique », *L'Avantage, Votre journal*, 22(27), December 6, 2017, p. 5.

⁴⁵⁰ See « Connaître l'état de la cathédrale, puis décider rapidement », *L'Avantage, Votre journal*, December 7, 2017, (web), consulted April 8, 2021, <https://www.lavantage.qc.ca/article/2017/12/07/connaître-l-etat-de-la-cathedrale--puis-decider-rapidement>, original: « Je ne veux pas qu'on commence à détruire Rimouski, puisque j'ai passé les 45 dernières années à contribuer à bâtir cette ville ... Ce n'est pas une question de religion de vouloir sauver la cathédrale, c'est une question de patrimoine. L'avenue de la Cathédrale, on risque de l'appeler la rue des ruines avant longtemps ».

overwhelming support for Jean-Yves Roy gave the pro-restoration side an urgent mandate. He was worried the outgoing council would illegitimately use their last remaining meetings to push through anti-cathedral resolutions⁴⁵¹.

In response Parish Council president, Norman Lavoie, decided immediately not to seek a new mandate describing the previous two months as “fatal” and the last year as the “worst he has ever seen”⁴⁵², which was welcome news for pro-restoration wardens and the Diocesan Coalition. The diocese’s reply was to ignore the candidates for council president proposed by the churchwardens – contrary to the conventional process – and instead appointed René Roy, who had just lost his election and had also resigned as president three years previously on bad terms. Landry complained to the press that it was

a choice that will lean in favour of the desacralisation of the cathedral ... I am afraid that we are trying to gain time to drown the fish. I believe that they want to put the population to sleep, while on our side, we would be able to proceed quickly⁴⁵³.

Popular essayist Gilles Le Chasseur’s reaction was published in various papers, including Québec City’s *Le Soleil*, where he argued that the Archdiocese should interpret the elections as an overwhelming rejection of its plans to desacralise the cathedral and proposed two simple votes, one for the diocese (do you want the cathedral to be desacralised?) and the other for Rimouski

⁴⁵¹ See « Victor Lepage souhaite la présence de tous les nouveaux élus », *L’Avantage, Votre journal*, December 11, 2017, (web), consulted April 8, 2021, <https://www.lavantage.qc.ca/article/2017/12/11/victor-lepage-souhaite-la-presence-de-tous-les-nouveaux-elus>.

⁴⁵² See « Normand Lavoie, ‘écœuré’, ne sollicitera pas de nouveau mandat », *L’Avantage, Votre journal*, December 12, 2017, (web), consulted April 8, 2021, <https://www.lavantage.qc.ca/article/2017/12/12/normand-lavoie---ecoeure---ne-sollicitera-pas-de-nouveau-manda>.

⁴⁵³ See « ‘Trois excellents candidats rejetés du revers de la main’ – Jacques Landry », *L’Avantage, Votre journal*, January 4, 2018, (web), consulted April 8, 2021, <https://www.lavantage.qc.ca/article/2018/01/04/--trois-excellents-candidats-rejetes-du-revers-de-la-main---jac>, original: « ... un choix qui va pencher en faveur de la désacralisation de la cathédrale ... Je crains qu'on essaie ainsi, encore, de gagner du temps pour noyer le poisson. Je crois qu'on veut endormir la population tandis que de notre côté., nous serions en mesure de procéder rapidement ».

taxpayers (would you support taxes being spent on the cathedral and to what degree?)⁴⁵⁴. He condemned Mgr. Grondin's attitude toward the building complaining that "he behaves as if he is the owner when in fact, he only has free use of it" pointing to the unprecedented testing of a confrontation between civil and canon law represented by the new situation⁴⁵⁵. Another notable reaction was that of former warden Jean-Marc Lavoie, who had served for twenty years on the council. He denounced the way Mgr. Grondin nominated the president and vice president, calling it an uncooperative break with tradition and disrespectful of democracy⁴⁵⁶. Former mayoral candidate Jean Richard devised the following formula to describe the Archbishop:

"Bishop Grondin may be a man of faith, but I see that he is one of those who are acting in bad faith in the matter of the cathedral. I would remind Bishop Grondin that if there is no cathedral, there should be no archbishop⁴⁵⁷.

With public opinion largely siding with the Diocesan Coalition and the new wardens, the pro-restoration camp was becoming more and more strident and as the civil stewards of the cathedral, the Parish Council began unilaterally pushing forward with its restoration plan⁴⁵⁸.

With their new majority on the Parish Council five to two, wardens immediately set to work to use their civil powers to sidestep the Archdiocese's wishes to divest itself of the cathedral. Moreover, their cooperation with the Diocesan Coalition meant tapping into Landry's growing coalition of people concerned by church closures. Daniel Thériault, regional director of the Knights of

⁴⁵⁴ See Gilles Le Chasseur, « À qui appartient la cathédrale de Rimouski? », *Le Soleil*, December 12, 2017, (web), consulted April 8, 2021, <https://www.lesoleil.com/opinions/a-qui-appartient-la-cathedrale-de-rimouski-c9ee8eab390664c40cc8661be503ce25>, original: « Il se comporte comme s'il en était le propriétaire, alors que dans les faits, il n'en a que l'usage gratuit ».

⁴⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵⁶ See Jean-Marc Lavoie, « La démocratie de l'évêque », *L'Avantage, Votre journal*, January 23, 2018, (web), consulted April 8, 2021, [lavantage.qc.ca/article/2018/01/23/la-democratie-de-leveque](https://www.lavantage.qc.ca/article/2018/01/23/la-democratie-de-leveque).

⁴⁵⁷ See Jean Richard, « Les reproches s'accumulent contre Mgr. Grondin », *L'Avantage, Votre journal*, January 23, 2018, (web), consulted April 8, 2021, <https://www.lavantage.qc.ca/article/2018/01/23/les-reproches-s-accumulent-contre-mgr-grondin>, original: « Mgr. Grondin est peut-être un homme de foi, mais je constate qu'il est de ceux qui sont de mauvaise foi dans le dossier de la cathédrale. Je rappellerais ceci à Mgr. Grondin: s'il n'y a pas de cathédrale, il ne devrait pas y avoir d'archevêque ».

⁴⁵⁸ Based on the Parish Council election and letters to the editor.

Columbus⁴⁵⁹ offered his organisation's financial assistance⁴⁶⁰. He noted that preserving religious heritage is one of its main works and could offer important sums, noting past heritage efforts such as donations towards the Holy Door of Notre-Dame-de-Québec and the restoration of the Vatican's Saint-Peter's Square⁴⁶¹.

In late February, the Diocesan Coalition and the Parish Council hosted an information session to present their tentative plan to parishioners and residents, which proposed fully closing Saint-Pie-X and Saint-Robert, and Pointe-au-Père on a partial basis during the winter months⁴⁶². Their plan for the cathedral suggested a range of activities besides worship, including classical choral and organ concerts, audiovisual (laser and music) performances on the façade, visits to the catacombs, a virtual visit application, a small shop and a votive candle chapel⁴⁶³. In mid-April, the Parish Council made it known that they were nearly ready to announce their plan for the cathedral. One unnamed source chided, in reference to the plan, "I can't wait to see how Mgr. Grondin will react to this"⁴⁶⁴. He did not have long to wait.

⁴⁵⁹ Les Chevaliers de Colomb in Québec, are a Catholic fraternal benefit society for laymen.

⁴⁶⁰ There are more than 5,000 members in the diocese.

⁴⁶¹ See « 'Pour la cathédrale, ce serait tout de suite approuvé!' – Daniel Thériault », *L'Avantage, Votre journal*, December 30, 2017, (web), consulted April 8, 2021, <https://www.lavantage.qc.ca/article/2017/12/30/--pour-la-cathedrale--ce-serait-tout-de-suite-approuve----danie>.

⁴⁶² See « Le dossier de la cathédrale s'en va enfin vers un dénouement », *L'Avantage, Votre journal*, February 15, 2018, (web), consulted April 8, 2021, <https://www.lavantage.qc.ca/article/2018/02/15/le-dossier-de-la-cathedrale-sen-va-enfin-vers-un-denouement>.

⁴⁶³ See Edith Drouin, « Cathédrale de Rimouski: le projet de lieu de culte à nouveau présenté », *Ici Radio-Canada – Bas-Saint-Laurent*, February 22, 2018, (web), consulted April 8, 2021, <https://ici.radio-canada.ca/nouvelle/1085198/cathedrale-rimouski-projet-lieu-culte-regroupement-diocesain>.

⁴⁶⁴ See « Une assemblée citoyenne pour la cathédrale est organisée », *L'Avantage, Votre journal*, April 18, 2018, (web), consulted April 8, 2021, <https://www.lavantage.qc.ca/article/2018/04/18/une-assemblee-citoyenne-pour-la-cathedrale-est-organisee>, original, « J'ai hâte de voir comment Mgr. Grondin réagira à ça ».

F. Conclusion: April 20, 2018, to April 24, 2020

1. *Decree*

Days later the triumphant pro-restoration Parish Council, which had for four short months administered five churches and 1,500 regular churchgoers, found themselves orphaned from their lands, resources and members, which had all been transferred to a new parish which had been annexed from the cathedral to form the parish of la Bienheureuse-Élisabeth Turgeon. All that remained of the old parish was the cathedral, its rectory and the lands occupied by the parking lot along the Saint-Lawrence⁴⁶⁵. The archbishop reasoned,

as there were already three supporters of the Diocesan Coalition within sitting on the Saint-Germain parish council, the election of the two new wardens, likewise followers of their ideology, gave them the majority within the Parish Council. As a result, they would place the conservation of the cathedral above all other considerations: for them the cathedral must be saved at all costs, even if it means selling the other churches, at the expense of pastoral life⁴⁶⁶.

Chancellor Yves-Marie Mélançon pointed out that anyone who wished to switch back to the old Parish was free to do so, as long as they promised to pay their tithe and make a donation: “[t]his is a referendum. If 900 people register⁴⁶⁷ ... that's close to \$150,000 that will go into the coffers every year”⁴⁶⁸. Stated otherwise, as the chancellor did later to Jean-Charles Lechasseur after a heavy snow fall: “you have your cathedral; go shovel”⁴⁶⁹. Mgr. Grondin told reporters several days later

⁴⁶⁵ See Denis Grondin, « Dossier cathédrale de Rimouski : L’archevêque décrète l’érection d’une nouvelle paroisse », Office of the Archbishop, April 20, 2018, (web), consulted April 8, 2021, <http://www.diocesisrimouski.com/ch/dec/st-germain2018.pdf>.

⁴⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, original: « Comme il y avait déjà trois partisans du Regroupement diocésain au sein de la fabrique de Saint-Germain, l’élection des deux nouveaux marguilliers, eux aussi avec l’idéologie de ce groupe, a accordé la majorité au sein de l’Assemblée de fabrique. La conservation de la cathédrale passe par-dessus toutes les autres considérations: on sauvegarde la cathédrale à tout prix, quitte à vendre les autres églises, et ce, même au détriment de la vie pastorale ».

⁴⁶⁷ The number of people who signed Jacques Landry’s petition.

⁴⁶⁸ See Adeline Mantyk, « L’Archevêché reprend la barre », *L’Avantage, Votre journal*, 22(47), April 25, 2018, p. 1,8, original: « C’est un référendum. Si 900 personnes qui s’y inscrivent ... ce sont près de 150 000\$ qui vont entrer dans les coffres chaque année ».

⁴⁶⁹ See interview with Jean-Charles Lechasseur by Ryan Lux, *Op. Cit.*, 1 :19 :30 mins., original: « Vous avez votre cathédrale. Allez, pelleter! ».

that he had no intention of selling the cathedral, nor of giving it away, but insisted on the need to change its vocation while maintaining its status as a cathedral with room for worship, but importantly, desacralised – the point of contention between the two parties. However, Mgr. Grondin encouraged people not to see in black and white: “some see deconsecration as a profanation. It's not”⁴⁷⁰.

Not only did the Archdiocese's actions predictably infuriate the Diocesan Coalition and the new Parish Council, but it also invoked the ire of unaligned notables such as Nicole Bherer (who later joined the Coalition) to make their feelings public:

citizens of Rimouski ... Yes, you understand well, the bishop has just withdrawn your title of parishioner of Saint-Germain ... this will be the beginning of the end of the Church of Rimouski and the diocese of Saint-Germain⁴⁷¹.

Blaming Mgr. Grondin's entourage, another Rimouskois, entrepreneur Marcel Gagné, interpreted the action as a “headlong rush and a move to free the archbishop from his responsibilities as manager of the diocese”⁴⁷². One last example, another local businessperson, Micheline Simpson, suspected the clergy's motives:

And now that the population is less and less 'present', the clergy sells at will churches and rectories paid for by the faithful and manage their affiliation to the remaining churches as if they were pawns to be moved on a chequerboard⁴⁷³.

⁴⁷⁰ See Johanne Fournier, « Rebondissement dans le dossier de la cathédrale de Rimouski », *Le Soleil*, April 23, 2018, (web), consulted April 8, 2021, <https://www.lesoleil.com/actualite/en-region/rebondissement-dans-le-dossier-de-la-cathedrale-de-rimouski-74ccd8d2ea90e3ffe330d5e786e7f437>, original: « Certains voient dans la désacralisation une profanation. Ce n'est pas ça ».

⁴⁷¹ See Nicole Bherer, « Bravo Monseigneur », *L'Avantage, Votre journal*, April 22, 2018, (web), consulted April 8, 2021, <http://www.lavantage.qc.ca/opinion/2018/4/22/bravo-monseigneur.html>, original: « citoyens de Rimouski ... Oui vous comprenez bien, l'évêque vient juste de vous retirer le titre de paroissien de Saint-Germain ... le début de la fin de l'Église de Rimouski et du diocèse Saint-Germain ».

⁴⁷² See Marcel Gagné, « Pour une restauration de la cathédrale dans les plus brefs délais », *L'Avantage, Votre journal*, June 18, 2018, (web), consulted April 8, 2021, <https://www.lavantage.qc.ca/article/2018/06/18/pour-une-restauration-de-la-cathedrale>, original: « une fuite en avant et d'une démarche visant à dégager l'archevêque, de ses responsabilités de gestionnaire du diocèse ».

⁴⁷³ See Micheline Simpson, « Micheline Simpson inquiète au plus haut point pour la cathédrale de Rimouski », *L'Avantage, Votre journal*, June 22, 2018, (web), consulted April 8, 2021,

Gilles Le Chasseur had his word to say, urging Mgr. Grondin to govern by example, and cautioning him that though the action was within his absolute powers as bishop, the misuse of the Parish law is immoral⁴⁷⁴. The Diocesan Coalition reacted, calling the parish annexation, “an act of authority [that is] the will of a single individual ...paternalistic and condescending”⁴⁷⁵... “It is almost as if we were in the time of the Inquisition. It's no longer just one man who can decide for everyone!”⁴⁷⁶.

Of the six wardens orphaned by the new parish, four remained to carry on fighting against the cathedral's desacralisation: Albert Carré, Nathalie Leblond, Jean-Charles Le Chasseur, and Victor Lepage⁴⁷⁷. The quartet, who were christened in the press as the “irreducible four”, notified the Archdiocese in June 2018 that it had to refuse liability for the cathedral's negligence, explaining that because the archbishop refused to name a president, the Parish Council was unable to hire contractors, and even if it could, would not be able to pay them, because they had no access to bank accounts⁴⁷⁸. But they did have the cathedral, and the four decided to use one of its best assets to remind Rimouskois of the fact.

<https://www.lavantage.qc.ca/article/2018/06/22/inquiete-au-plus-haut-point-pour-le-devenir-de-la-cathedrale-de->, original: « *Et maintenant que cette population est de moins en moins au 'rendez-vous', le clergé vend à sa guise des églises et presbytères payés par les fidèles et il gère leur affiliation aux églises restantes comme s'il s'agissait de pions à déplacer sur un damier* ».

⁴⁷⁴ See Gilles Le Chasseur, « Encore et toujours la... », *L'Avantage, Votre journal*, April 26, 2018, (web), consulted April 8, 2021, <http://lavantage.qc.ca/opinion/tribune-libre/2018/4/26/encore-et-toujours-la-cathedrale.html>.

⁴⁷⁵ See Julie Tremblay & Denis Leduc, « Pas de vente ou de don de la cathédrale de Rimouski, dit Mgr. Grondin », *Ici Bas-Saint-Laurent*, April 23, 2018, (web), consulted April 8, 2021, <https://ici.radio-canada.ca/nouvelle/1096809/archeveche-intention-vente-donner-cathedrale-rimouski-denis-grondin>, original: *un geste d'autorité [qui relève de] la volonté d'un seul individu ...paternaliste et condescendante*. ».

⁴⁷⁶ See Johanne Fournier, « Rebondissement dans le dossier de la cathédrale », *Op. Cit.*, original: « *On se croirait quasiment dans le temps de l'inquisition. Ce n'est plus juste un bonhomme qui peut décider pour tout le monde!* »

⁴⁷⁷ Jean-Yves Roy resigned calling the action “ridiculous” and the anti-restoration warden, Gilbert Laprise monitored the group but eventually moved to the new parish. See, « Un marguillier de la paroisse Saint-Germain démissionne », *Ici Bas-Saint-Laurent*, April 26, 2018, (web), consulted April 8, 2021, <https://ici.radio-canada.ca/nouvelle/1097610/demission-marguillier-cathedrale-paroisse-saint-germain-monseigneur-denis-grondin>.

⁴⁷⁸ See Adeline Mantyk, « Les marguilliers transfèrent la responsabilité de la paroisse », *L'Avantage, Votre journal*, 23(4), June 27, 2018, p. 3.

To the surprise of residents and tourists strolling downtown, the four held an impromptu organ “test” played by its titular, Josée April. In conjunction with the event, they had the registry available for parishioners to return to the old parish⁴⁷⁹. The event gave the wardens an opportunity to inspect the cathedral, and they reported that, against all odds, other than the roof, the building remained in good condition.

Soon after the concert, deemed “illegal” by the Archdiocese, the four churchwardens faced retaliation. The new parish seized everything: office and kitchen equipment, antique furniture, plates, even the telephone line, which they moved to Saint-Pie-X’s rectory⁴⁸⁰. Leblond described the rectory’s state once they were finished as unacceptable and reports finding rosaries, breviaries, crucifixes, and other religious objects thrown in the garbage pail⁴⁸¹. In response the wardens publicised details of financial irregularities, accusing the new parish of using the cathedral restoration fund as a chequing account, which they alleged was missing \$212,000⁴⁸².

Registering represented another significant obstacle for those who wished to return to the old parish. Susie Robichaud and Luc Brosseau found the process very counter-intuitive. First, they naturally went to Saint-Germain’s rectory, where they thought they would find the registry. Not being able to find any information, they next went to Saint-Pie-X where the new parish administration had moved, only to discover they needed to go to the Archdiocese to make the change. The couple explained they wanted to register to try to help save the cathedral but worried

⁴⁷⁹ See Adeline Mantyk, « Les marguilliers organisent un mini concert d’orgue dans la cathédrale de Rimouski », *L’Avantage, Votre journal*, July 5, 2018, (web), consulted April 8, 2021, <https://www.lavantage.qc.ca/article/2018/07/05/les-marguilliers-organisent-un-mini-concert-dorgue-dans-la-cathedrale>.

⁴⁸⁰ See Charles Lepage, « Le non-respect d’un décret mène la vie dure aux marguilliers de la paroisse Saint-Germain », *L’Avantage, Votre journal*, July 18, 2018, (web), consulted April 8, 2021, <https://www.lavantage.qc.ca/article/2018/07/18/le-non-respect-dun-decret-mene-la-vie-dure-aux-marguilliers-de-l>.

⁴⁸¹ See Johanne Fournier, « Rimouski, une paroisse sens dessus dessous », *Le Soleil*, July 18, 2018, p. HE.

⁴⁸² *Ibid.*

that few other people would go to such lengths⁴⁸³. When the wardens asked the Archdiocese for the registry, Chancellor Mélançon informed them that it was Archdiocese property and that if they wanted the information, they would have to copy it out by hand⁴⁸⁴. The following week the local newspaper quoted an anonymous archdiocesan administrator, who leaked news of a significant development: the cathedral could soon be desacralised and ceded to the City, but only after the “imminent resignations” of the four irreducible, a requirement which might explain the war of attrition tactics imposed on them⁴⁸⁵. Mgr. Grondin had this to say in response: “When we are in fear, we bristle and then we don't accept anything that the bishop can say, and only wonder when will he come and break our legs? Of course, this is not my goal”⁴⁸⁶

2. *From the Media to the Courts*

Meanwhile, instead of bending to the Parish Council's aggressive behaviour, the Diocesan Coalition was preparing a lawsuit in a final effort to achieve its aims, naming as defendants the Ministry of Culture, the City of Rimouski, the Archdiocese, former Parish Council of Saint-Germain, the Holy See and Pope Francis. The suit demanded heritage recognition and status from the Ministry of Culture; from the City, to enforce its heritage and public safety legislation; from the parish and diocese, the reintegration of the parish and assurances against desacralisation, to carry out repairs, and to reopen the cathedral; and, lastly, for the Pope to order Mgr. Grondin to

⁴⁸³ See Pierre Michaud, « À l'archevêché pour s'enregistrer », *L'Avantage, Votre journal*, August 29, 2018, (web), consulted April 8, <https://www.lavantage.qc.ca/article/2018/08/29/a-l-archeveche-pour-s-enregistrer>.

⁴⁸⁴ See Pierre Michaud, « La Fabrique doit créer un registre parallèle », *L'Avantage, Votre journal*, August 30, 2018, (web), consulted April 8, 2021, <https://www.lavantage.qc.ca/article/2018/08/30/la-fabrique-doit-creer-un-registre-parallele>.

⁴⁸⁵ See Pierre Michaud, « Rimouski pourrait revenir dans le dossier », *L'Avantage, Votre journal*, 23(13), September 5, 2018, p. 3.

⁴⁸⁶ See Martin Brassard, « Monseigneur Grondin répond aux nombreuses critiques », *Énergie Rimouski*, April 23, 2018, (web), consulted February 11, 2021, <https://www.iheartradio.ca/energie/energie-rimouski/nouvelles/monseigneur-grondin-repond-aux-nombreuses-critiques-1.3771238>, original: « *Quand on est dans la peur, on se crispe et puis on accepte rien de ce que l'évêque peut dire, quand est-ce que l'évêque va nous casser les jambes. Bien évidemment, ce n'est pas mon but* ».

reopen the cathedral⁴⁸⁷. The Coalition did not receive any kind of acknowledgement until October 25, when the archbishop published an open letter announcing he was naming a mediator, Mgr. Marc Pelchat of Quebec City, to help break the impasse, a decision he highlighted had the support of Cardinal Gérald Cyprien Lacroix and Mgr. Bonazzi, representative of Rome in Canada⁴⁸⁸. As a sign of good faith, the Diocesan Coalition suspended its civil suit. Mgr. Pelchat published his report, entitled “Confidence and Audacity” a month later, in which he conceded that “trust in the archbishop and his close collaborators has been shaken ...[and] that a 'toxic climate' has developed”⁴⁸⁹. Nevertheless, Mgr. Pelchat judged the Diocesan Coalition’s proposal as unrealistic, but also that the erection of the new parish was inappropriate and only aggravated divisions⁴⁹⁰. His recommendations included creating an advisory committee composed of members of all constituencies, hiring a project supervisor (Jean Crépeault), consulting external heritage experts, and encouraging the Ministry of Culture to revise heritage status, prioritise respecting the organ’s sonority, assume responsibility of the building by the Archdiocese and ultimately its transfer either to the City or a not-for-profit⁴⁹¹.

⁴⁸⁷ See Cabinet Guy Bertrand, « Comité de sauvegarde de la Cathédrale de Rimouski v. Procureur général du Québec, Ville de Rimouski, L’Archevêque catholique romain de Saint-Germain de Rimouski, Fabrique de la paroisse Saint-Germain de Rimouski, Saint-Siège et Sa Sainteté le pape François 1^{er}, Formal Notice », September 6, 2018.

⁴⁸⁸ See Adeline Mantyk, « Lettre de Mgr. Grondin sur la cathédrale Saint-Germain de Rimouski », *L’Avantage*, *Votre journal*, October 25, 2018, (web), consulted April 8, 2021, <https://www.lavantage.qc.ca/article/2018/10/25/cathedrale-saint-germain-de-rimouski#:~:text=Lettre%20de%20Mgr%20Grondin%20sur%20la%20cath%C3%A9drale%20Saint-Germain%20de%20Rimouski,-%C2%A9Archives&text=Cath%C3%A9drale%20Saint-Germain%20de%20Rimouski%20est%20ferm%C3%A9%20au,depuis%20pr%C3%A8s%20de%204%20ans.&text=Nous%20sommes%20appel%C3%A9s%20%C3%A0%20voir,la%20communaut%C3%A9%20catholique%20de%20Rimouski>.

⁴⁸⁹ See Marc Pelchat, « La cathédrale Saint-Germain de Rimouski et son avenir : Confiance et audace », Rimouski, Diocese of Rimouski, November 30, 2018, (web), consulted April 8, 2021, p. 2, http://www.diocesisrimouski.com/riki/pdf/avenir_cathedrale_rimouski.pdf, original: « la confiance envers l’archevêque et ses proches collaborateurs a été ébranlée ... qu’un 'climat toxique' s’est développé »

⁴⁹⁰ *Idem.*, p. 5,6.

⁴⁹¹ *Idem.*, p. 7-8.

However, as a barometer of the mediation's success, consider an example: only one week after the report's publication, the cathedral wardens lodged a formal complaint with the Québec Provincial Police to investigate more than \$200,000 that went missing from its accounts within one month. The Archdiocese explained the missing money, reporting that it was borrowed "temporarily" and would be returned once the cathedral's Parish Council became functional, even though its dysfunction was owed to the Archdiocese's refusal to name a president⁴⁹². The churchwardens had notably proposed retired engineer and associate of the Coalition Raymond Garneau, who after meeting with Mgr. Grondin was accepted pending the formality of a signed letter. After months of waiting for the letter, Garneau visited the Bishop's Residence to see what was taking so long and crossed paths with Chancellor Mélançon, a member of the local *curia*. Garneau recalls that "he chatted with me for almost half an hour, telling me that the bishop did not have the right to meet with me alone, that the bishop is not the only one to make the decision and ... that probably there will not be a letter at all"⁴⁹³. The archbishop left for a trip to Africa and in his absence, Rimouski's *curia* blocked Garneau's nomination, which was expected in January 2019.

Upon his return in February, Mgr. Grondin announced a concrete plan for the cathedral, which explains why he was loath to give the renegade wardens a president, and thereby risk ennobling his opponents. In a press conference indicative of the reigning climate of suspicion, security officers patrolled the carefully curated audience, Mgr. Grondin announced, in a gesture of

⁴⁹² See Jean-Louis Bordeleau, « Cathédrale de Rimouski : de présumées transactions bancaires irrégulières? », *Ici Radio-Canada – Bas Saint-Laurent*, December 6, 2018, (web), consulted April 8, 2021, <https://ici.radio-canada.ca/nouvelle/1140358/cathedrale-fabrique-saint-germain-transactions-bancaires>.

⁴⁹³ See Julie Tremblay, « Les pouvoirs des bénévoles de l'Archevêché restreints ... par les règles de l'Archevêché », *Ici Radio-Canada – Bas-Saint-Laurent*, June 4, 2019, (web), consulted April 8, 2021, <https://ici.radio-canada.ca/nouvelle/1173335/cathedrale-rimouski-st-germain-fabrique-eglise-vocation-culte-chicane>, original: « Il m'a jasé pendant presque une demie heure de temps pour me dire que l'évêque n'avait pas le droit de me rencontrer seul à seul, que l'évêque n'est pas seul à prendre la décision et ... que probablement qu'il n'y aura pas de lettre de tout ».

compromise, that a portion of the cathedral would remain a consecrated cathedral representing 25 to 30 per cent of the building, enough to accommodate 200 people⁴⁹⁴. The rest of the cathedral, according to his plan, would be transformed to accommodate cultural, tourist and community activities. With respect to the diocese's financial contribution, it would be proportional to the amount of space dedicated to religious activities, amounting to \$1.5 million⁴⁹⁵. Mayor Parent reacted with ambivalence, noting that the project could "cannibalise" the brand-new cultural centre next to the cathedral⁴⁹⁶. Neither were the wardens satisfied. They described the project as the "vestibule cathedral" and an "empty shell":

We understand that the Archdiocese wants to maintain the cathedral's religious vocation, but it will be cosmetic. It's decay, because here we present a preservation of the built heritage outside, but inside, there will be no real religious practice in this building, which would still be called a cathedral⁴⁹⁷.

Gilles Le Chasseur likened the project to Louis Khalil's *Projet Paradis*, complaining that mediation should have cultivated compromise and that instead it seemed more like an effort in conciliating the population to the same plan as when the whole saga began⁴⁹⁸.

Confronting yet again intractability from one side, like the other, the parties returned to court. Jacques Landry explained that no meaningful mediation occurred, that the project presented by the

⁴⁹⁴ See Johanne Fournier, « Cathédrale de Rimouski : la fin d'une longue saga », *Le Soleil*, February 6, 2019, p. HE.

⁴⁹⁵ See Julie Tremblay, « La cathédrale de Rimouski changera de vocation », *Ici Radio-Canada – Bas-Saint-Laurent*, February 6, 2018, (web), consulted April 8, 2021, <https://ici.radio-canada.ca/nouvelle/1151338/cathedrale-rimouski-vocation-transformation-sauvegarde#:~:text=Selon%20Mgr%20Grondin%2C%20le%20projet,cath%C3%A9drale%20Saint%2DGermain%20se%20concr%C3%A9tise>.

⁴⁹⁶ See Johanne Fournier, « Cathédrale de Rimouski : la fin d'une longue saga », *Op. Cit.*

⁴⁹⁷ See Adeline Mantyk, « Le projet de transformation déçoit », *L'Avantage, Votre journal*, February 13, 2019, p. 3, original: « On comprend l'Archevêché veut maintenir la cathédrale dans une vocation religieuse, mais ça va être cosmétique. C'est un leurre, car on présente ici une préservation du patrimoine bâti extérieur, mais à l'intérieur, il n'y aura pas de réelle pratique religieuse dans cet édifice, qu'on qualifie encore de cathédrale ».

⁴⁹⁸ See Gilles Le Chasseur, « Cathédrale de Rimouski, retour à la case de départ », *L'Avantage, Votre journal*, February 11, 2019, (web), consulted April 8, 2021, <https://www.lavantage.qc.ca/article/2019/02/11/cathedrale-de-rimouski-retour-a-la-case-depart>.

archbishop sought to minimise his financial responsibility and maximise that of the City, and so the lawsuit would resume⁴⁹⁹.

The Archdiocese responded in kind with a lawsuit of its own accusing the four irreducible wardens of negligence and failure to perform their duties of maintaining the cathedral by not paying bills for a leak coming from the heating system, which took place in October 2018. It was detected by the City, which shared the system for the cultural centre next door, and as such undertook the urgent repairs unilaterally. Afterwards the Archdiocese received a bill on behalf of the Cathedral Parish. In the lawsuit, the Archdiocese argued that the four could have used their personal funds to carry out repairs and that failing to do so constituted negligence⁵⁰⁰. While Landry's lawsuit never proceeded, the Archdiocese's provided sufficient opportunity for a judge to clarify who was responsible for the cathedral and provide the wardens with a president, which would allow them to operate as administrators.

While the case worked its way through the judicial process, the Diocesan Coalition organised a large June rally to promote their plan to save the cathedral, where they showed videos and presented information on a large screen set up on the lands in front of the cathedral. The event was intended to demonstrate the popular will behind Landry's movement and managed to attract 200

⁴⁹⁹ See Julie Tremblay, « Cathédrale de Rimouski : le Regroupement diocésain reprend ses poursuites », *Ici Radio-Canada – Bas-Saint-Laurent*, February 28, 2019, (web), consulted April 2, 2021, https://www.google.com/search?q=Cath%C3%A9drale+de+Rimouski+%3A+le+Regroupement+dioc%C3%A9sain+reprend+ses+poursuites&rlz=1C1CHBF_enCA918CA918&oq=Cath%C3%A9drale+de+Rimouski+%3A+le+Regroupement+dioc%C3%A9sain+reprend+ses+poursuites&aqs=chrome..69i57.895j0j4&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-8.

⁵⁰⁰ See Julie Tremblay, « Cathédrale de Rimouski : une fuite d'eau et une nouvelle poursuite », *Ici Radio-Canada – Bas-Saint-Laurent*, April 25, 2019, (web), consulted April 8, 2021, <https://ici.radio-canada.ca/nouvelle/1165913/cathedrale-eglise-st-germain-rimouski-archeveche-judiciaire-reparations-fabrique>.

people⁵⁰¹. Addressing the archbishop, who was in attendance, Landry pleaded with him to understand,

[y]ou don't hear yourself; we're tired of hearing about it, listen... We are all sleeping at the wheel, and we keep hoping that a donor will come and solve all the problems, but it doesn't work the same way in real life⁵⁰².

To show good will and appreciation for the archbishop's presence, Landry also announced the Coalition would indefinitely withdraw its lawsuit. Putting action to words, the coalition spent the rest of the summer launching a subscription campaign to raise money for the cathedral called "Friends of the Cathedral" for which they sold more than 4,000 membership cards at \$5 each⁵⁰³.

Demonstrating some mutuality, Mgr. Grondin emphasised that the goal was not unanimity, but rather an acceptable consensus that will support the cathedral's survival for another 50 years⁵⁰⁴.

By his presence, the archbishop said,

I am sending a message of an attitude change and a revision of posture that everyone should consider constructive. Not to appropriate a project, but to say: we are going to make it a common project⁵⁰⁵.

⁵⁰¹ « 200 personnes mobilisées pour l'avenir de la cathédrale à Rimouski », *Radio-Canada*, June 16, 2019, (web), consulted April 23, 2021, <https://ici-radio-canada.ca/cathedrale-rimouski-manifestation-sauvegarde-eglise-avenir>.

⁵⁰² See Martin Brassard, « Un début de rapprochement entre le Regroupement diocésain et l'Archevêque », *Énergie Rimouski*, June 17, 2019, (web), consulted April 23, 2021, <https://www.iheartradio.ca/rouge-fm/rouge-fm-rimouski/nouvelles/un-debut-de-rapprochement-entre-le-regroupement-diocesain-et-l-archeveque-1.9338013>, original: « Vous vous entendez pas, on est tanné d'en entendre parler, entendez-vous ... On dort tous sur le switch pis on espère que le mécène va arriver et régler tous les problèmes, mais ça ne marche pas de même dans la vraie-vie ».

⁵⁰³ See « Le Regroupement diocésain veut recueillir des fonds pour la cathédrale de Rimouski », *Ici Radio-Canada Bas-Saint-Laurent*, August 29, 2019, (web), consulted April 23, 2021, <https://ici.radio-canada.ca/nouvelle/1279204/cathedrale-rimouski-renovation-eglise->.

⁵⁰⁴ *Idem*.

⁵⁰⁵ See Miriane Demers-Lemay, « Cathédrale de Rimouski : une accalmie se dessine », *Ici Bas-Saint-Laurent*, June 18, 2019, (web), consulted April 23, 2021, <https://ici.radio-canada.ca/nouvelle/1187259/cathedrale-rimouski-manifestation-sauvegarde-eglise-avenir>, original: « Je lance un message de révision d'attitude et de posture que chacun doit prendre pour être constructif. Non pas de s'approprier un projet, mais de dire: on va en faire un projet commun ».

Later that summer, the Archdiocese hired Jean Crépeault as project manager tasked with incorporating the wardens' concerns into the future project⁵⁰⁶. Mgr. Grondin formed yet another advisory committee in late November composed of entrepreneurs, lawyers, accountants, bankers, and representatives of the cultural milieu⁵⁰⁷. The Parish Council would be represented by project manager Jean Crépeault and Vicar General Abbé Guy Lagacé.

Up to this point, Matane native, Abbé Lagacé, 75-years-old when we met, and who had been a priest since 1971, managed to avoid involvement in the cathedral imbroglio. Before he was named Vicar General in 2018, Abbé Lagacé had overseen pastoral care for the diocese since 2015, which for him took priority over church buildings. He noted that he was not ordained a priest to be a caretaker of bricks and mortar, but rather to spread the Gospel. Of note is the subject of his doctoral dissertation in theology from the Université de Montréal, which focused on laypersons' difficulty with decision making within the Church. He told me in an interview that he understood why non-churchgoers find present changes so difficult and attributed the division between their perspective and that of the clergy to ignorance. Lagacé explained that priests long-ago reconciled with the reality of a smaller Church having witnessed a steep decline in religious practice in just the last decade, offering as an example the observation that as pastoral animator in schools, catechism enrolment had declined from 850 youth in 2006 to just 300 in 2019⁵⁰⁸.

Notably absent from the new committee, however, were the cathedral's parish wardens, whose rapport with the new project supervisor had developed more acrimoniously than hoped, souring

⁵⁰⁶ See Adeline Mantyk, « Développement dans le dossier de la cathédrale », *L'Avantage, Votre journal*, 24(6), July 17, 2019, p. 6.

⁵⁰⁷ See Julie Tremblay, « Un nouveau comité se penchera sur l'avenir de la cathédrale Saint-Germain », *Ici Radio-Canada – Bas-Saint-Laurent*, November 26, 2019, (web), consulted April 23, 2021, <https://ici.radio-canada.ca/nouvelle/1404254/cathedrale-st-germain-avenir-rimouski-archeveche-projet-transformation>.

⁵⁰⁸ See interview with Abbé Lagacé by Ryan lux, February 2, 2021.

over access to the cathedral. Crépeault wanted access to the cathedral to undertake a new building inspection. The previous one was already five years old, but given the lawsuit before the courts, the wardens refused⁵⁰⁹.

When the matter first appeared before the courts in September, the wardens appeared without a lawyer, not being able to hire one due to still not having a president to execute administrative functions⁵¹⁰. The judge refused to hear the case until they engaged a lawyer, which Mgr. Grondin authorised them to do insisting that the wardens should not take the lawsuit personally but rather see it as a way to distinguish the powers between the Parish and the Archdiocese. Until the case was heard in late April 2020, the parties and the cathedral awaited a resolution in a state of purgatory.

This case description has traced the evolution of the cathedral scandal, which has dominated Rimouski's headlines for 15 years, beginning with the original parish fusion, followed by closures, first of former parish churches, then of the cathedral itself. We described the emergence of plans to desacralise and transform the cathedral first advanced by Committee 1862, then by its antithesis, Committee Cathedral 2016, which became the Diocesan Coalition to Save the Cathedral for which desacralisation was unacceptable. Ecclesiastical, political, and legal intrigues recounted in the previous pages illuminate the ebbs and flow of goodwill and intransigence between the citizens group and the Archdiocese, as well as between factions of churchwardens. Their arguments and actions have been detailed, as well as their protagonists outlined. The following chapter will pick

⁵⁰⁹ *Idem*.

⁵¹⁰ See Julie Tremblay, « Cathédrale de Rimouski : l'Archevêché souhaite un règlement à l'amiable », *Ici Radio-Canada – Bas-Saint-Laurent*, September 24, 2019 (web), consulted April 23, 2021, <https://ici.radio-canada.ca/nouvelle/1314923/cathedrale-rimouski-poursuite-fabrique-saint-germain-archeveque-denis-grondin>.

up where the present concludes, in February 2020, when interviews were conducted with the key actors, whose pictures and sociographic details are presented above.

IV. Chapter 2, Analysis of Cathedral Saint-Germain of Rimouski

Catholics belong to the Church by “référence,” by symbolic identification, sharing a common memory and a common hope ... including the saints, sculptures, and paintings they have admired ... Despite the bad memories ... - Catholics believe that the resources for compassion and social justice in the Church’s tradition allow them to have hope for a better future⁵¹¹.

A. Introduction: The Densest Example of Church Closure



Figure 2 First Mass after re-opening

Part of what makes Rimouski such an interesting case is its breadth and scale. On the one hand, the city is small enough that people know one another, especially within the restrained spheres of religion, politics and culture. On the other hand, the city is endowed with an outsized

institutional density and so, the vestiges of the Church’s former hegemony over their society are everywhere. When one disembarks the train, a visitor to the city will be impressed by the looming convent of the Sisters of Notre-Dame-du-Saint-Rosaire atop the hill. Look down to the Saint-Lawrence and you see the soaring steeple of Saint-Germain of Rimouski. Follow Saint-Jean-Baptiste Street to the West, and you to your right, you’ll find the massive former seminary and its carillon of bells, which still rhythm daily life. On your left hulks the former grand seminary where priests once trained, where I lodged during my week-long visit, and which I located in exactly this fashion when the train dropped me off at almost three in the morning. Nearly the whole upper town

⁵¹¹ See Gregory Baum, *Fernand Dumont: A Sociologist Turns to Theology*, McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2015, p.52-53.

was once dominated by religious institutions, which together made Rimouski the region's centre of social life. Before embarking on an analysis of the interviews, I would first like to take a moment to share several anecdotes collected while my recorder was turned off, and which furnished me with important ethnological insights that my initial cursory examination of newspaper clippings could never have yielded.

The first among these, for example, unveiled the degree of uncivility of relations between the protagonists. I admittedly arrived at what was likely the most difficult period of the cathedral closure conflict. For my first interview, I met with Gilles Le Chasseur, whom I expected to speak with in the seminary lounge. When he arrived, I met him in the foyer and in the glass-doored room to our left, there was a meeting taking place of 40 or 50 priests, possibly a synod, including Mgr. Denis Grondin. Le Chasseur's discomfort was evident, and he suggested we go to the public library instead. Of course, I did not know at the time that he had only recently made his act of apostasy, after years of pillorying the Archdiocese in the press. I had not considered how intimidating it could be to take strong and controversial public stances in a small city where religion was still an important social issue. I had essentially invited my first research participant into the lion's den, though he did not begrudge me for it and moved our meeting to the public library.

Another example took place at the elegantly appointed Archdiocese, where I met with Vicar General Guy Lagacé. Though Abbé Lagacé was kind and open, the same cannot be said for the cathedral project manager Jean Crépeault. He initially sat down with what seemed like the intention to surveil what Abbé Lagacé would say or control what I would ask, then decided, when Abbé Lagacé made it clear he would speak his own mind, Crépeault left. He petulantly stormed out, declaring he would not participate and advised the priest to do likewise. The paranoia reigning in the palatial building was electric.

I also experienced acts of unanticipated warmth, which reminded me of the subjects' baseline. Abbé Gérald Roy invited me to interview him in his home, not far from Saint-Pie-X. After the interview, Abbé Roy presented me with a book, written by one of his former professors, dedicated to mourning, and without his saying so, I understood that he intended it as a tool for me to understand his experience of church closure's impacts on individuals and communities. Abbé Roy drove me back to the seminary after our interview, but on the way he unlocked Saint-Pie-X and Saint-Robert to show me their beauty and amenities.

History professors Kurt Vignola and Pascal Gagnon invited me to the Cégep for their sessions, a building not much changed, since it served as the classical college in the 1960s. Gagnon was kind enough to show me the library, lodged in the former chapel. Until recently it was impossible to see the arced ceilings and other religious architectural features. It was interesting to see how secular and sacred can tastefully intermingle. In fact, Gagnon reported that before the floating ceilings were removed, students often behaved gregariously, but once the sacred architectural elements were revealed, as if by instinct, the students began to act with more *gravitas*. I was also grateful to the politicians, Marc Parent and Éric Forest for gifting me with their candor and providing me with access to their offices.

Another great source of generosity was Jacques Landry, who helped me find contacts, and for my benefit organised a group meeting of his Coalition with more than a dozen attendees. Meeting everyone: doctors, retired police officers, engineers, housewives, businessmen, staunch believers, and atheists; It gave me personal insight into the broad category of Rimouskois who opposed the cathedral's desacralisation and who devoted time and treasure to those ends. Likewise, Jean-Charles Lechasseur gave me the chance to visit the cathedral's interior, which, aside from some flaking paint, was in impeccable condition. For me this was a revelation, because all weeklong, all

I heard was about the cathedral's progressing decrepitude. Moreover, the ability to see, smell and hear the cathedral gave sensual life to the views I was there to collect.

This chapter will describe how subjects' worldviews and experiences informed their perspectives of the cathedral's closure by examining nine key actors' relationships to six important dimensions for Quebec's sociology of religion: a), identity; b), positions of authority; c), religious and d), legal infrastructures; e), politics; f), social conflict, and g), conclude by analysing how together these reveal and relate to more general patterns of cultural and religious change such as religious exculturation. By presenting individuals' orientations towards the closure, this chapter seeks to nuance what has so far been largely presented as a bilateral conflict opposing those who want to desacralise the cathedral and others who do not. The interviews analysed for this chapter provide a clearer focus of the various pathways that led participants to take one of the two positions than their coverage in the media. Ultimately, this chapter proposes a "social cartography" of a local scandal, formed by moving civilisational social forces, one that is simultaneously personal, structural, religious, and political. In so doing, the following pages identify and describe the components and dynamics of an 'anomalously exemplary'⁵¹² church closure, an example that reveals the potential of church closure as a "social fact", albeit one that is flammable, and thus fleeting.⁵¹³ But, to have such power, the subject of a phenomenon must be widely agreed upon.

B. Points of Convergence: the historical significance of Catholicism and the cathedral for identity production

Catholicism's significance for Quebec's national history was undisputed among my interlocutors. Historically, the Church possessed a widely accepted local meta-narrative in relation

⁵¹² In that its extremeness allows for the full range of social expression of church closure.

⁵¹³ See Marcel Mauss, « Essai sur le don forme et raison de l'échange dans les sociétés archaïques », *L'Année sociologique*, 1, 1925, p. 30-186.

to the City's development, a fact that ensured it a central place in locally shared memory, or symbolic identification. It was against this historical and imagined background that locals conceptualised their experience of cultural change, with the cathedral as an essential actor and witness over time; a subject of history, put another way.

1. *An Uncontested History*

Historically, local stories about the cathedral have been in wide circulation, enough that its lore is fairly uniform. However, wide local access to the cathedral's history was greatly enhanced by a substantial update with the 2016 publication of *La cathédrale de Rimouski: Parcours, mémoires, récits*⁵¹⁴, which enjoyed considerable local attention and consecrated the argument for the cathedral's arch-importance in Rimouski's establishment as an institutional hub and the "capital" of the Lower Saint Lawrence. The authors insisted upon the cathedral's significance as the pre-eminent site of religious, civil, and political socialisation until the 1970s.

Aside from its long institutional history, local history professor and former heritage society President Pascal Gagnon noted another constant across the cathedral's more than 150-year presence in Rimouski: its role in stoking conflict⁵¹⁵. One source of conflict that has remained virtually unchanged is the question of the building's scale. When Abbé Cyprien Tanguay arrived in Rimouski in 1850, there were already 3,653 souls living in the Parish⁵¹⁶, and they needed a larger church. Abbé Tanguay's problem was just the opposite of contemporary Rimouskois', but there are striking similarities between the acrimony of then and now. Plans called for the second

⁵¹⁴ See Kurt Vignola, « La cathédrale de Rimouski et le développement institutionnel de la ville », in Jean-René Thuot, Kurt Vignola & Nicolas Beaudry (dirs.), *La cathédrale de Rimouski. Parcours, mémoires, récits* Rimouski, *L'Estuaire*, 2016, p. 101-130.

⁵¹⁵ See Mario Mimeault, « La grande église des Rimouskois : genèse, enjeux et mise en œuvre d'un projet collectif », in Jean-René Thuot, Kurt Vignola & Nicolas Beaudry (dirs.), *La cathédrale de Rimouski. Parcours, mémoires, récits*, Rimouski, *L'Estuaire*, 2016, p. 23-52.

⁵¹⁶ *Idem.*, p. 25.

largest church in Lower Canada, crowned with a steeple that Gagnon believed to have been for a short time the tallest structure in all of Canada standing 69 metres. “It was a project that was completely crazy at that time, out of proportion. It was the CN tower of its time”⁵¹⁷. Parishioners could not agree on the new church’s dimensions, style, or location. Should it be “located by the river or high on the plateau? ... It tore the population apart. It was necessary to compromise”⁵¹⁸. Gagnon credited Abbé Tanguay’s leadership for shepherding the church’s completion despite countless legal battles between local businessmen, tradespeople, and the Parish”⁵¹⁹.

2. *Shared Memory: Understandings of the Cathedral as a Reference*

What makes memory different from history is the process of transmission: its conjugation with contemporary social conditions and its investment in the future. Nearly a century ago, Maurice Halbwachs conceived of collective memory as being “located within mental space given by social groups and linked to physical space occupied by social groups”⁵²⁰; or, in laymen’s terms: heritage. Rimouski’s cathedral performs a heritage function by, both physically and symbolically, conjuring local, family, and national associations to evoke a distinct culture (distinct from other cultures but also from the quotidian), a function Halbwachs argues is not used to “bring the past back to life, but [to] reconstruct it”⁵²¹.

All subjects agreed that religious heritage was important and when asked to define what the term “religious heritage” meant to them in relation to the cathedral, two broad categories emerged. In the first instance, subjects discussed religious heritage as 1), a sacred inheritance that comes with

⁵¹⁷ See interview with Pascal Gagnon by Ryan Lux, February 6, 2020, 13:00 mins., original: « *C'était un projet qui était complètement fou à cette époque, démesurée. C'était le tour CN de son époque* ».

⁵¹⁸ *Idem.*, 13:25 mins., original: « *Ça a déchiré la population. Il a fallu d'y avoir les compromis* ».

⁵¹⁹ *Idem.*, 12:20 mins., original: « *quelqu'un de proactif qui voyait au grand pour sa paroisse, alors il était capable à convaincre les gens à lui suivre dans la construction de cet immense bâtiment* ».

⁵²⁰ See Paul Connerton, *How Societies Remember*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989, p. 634.

⁵²¹ See Maurice Halbwachs, *Les cadres sociaux de la mémoire*, Paris, Presses Universitaires de France, 1925, p. 271.

an obligation to transmit to future generations. While they accepted that not all religious heritage could be saved, they drew a strict line on the limits to the social acceptability of certain transformations. Additionally, they said, religious heritage loses a significant amount of its effect when it no longer serves a religious vocation. The other prevailing perspective was that religious heritage is akin to 2), cultural touchstones (containers), which should evoke the past, as objects, by evolving with the present. Many drew on the example of Rome's Pantheon, built as a pagan temple, and which was transformed into a Catholic church. For them, the building's value is enhanced by its interaction with History as opposed to being shielded from it.

So, one perspective prioritises the content and the other the container. A third position is occupied by practising Catholics, both modernist and traditionalist, who 3), experience their churches as living heritage, in which buildings are secondary to religious belief. Both groups claim the most important heritage is Catholic values; however, place is important for both groups in the way that it can elevate the soul. Modernist Catholics prioritise the social life of their territorial parish, whereas traditionalists prefer accessing the sublime via the historical and architectural transcendental splendour of older vintage churches, which they engage with on a more abstract social level. For both types of practising Catholics, churches are indispensable tools to call upon memory to nourish their spiritual lives – what they both judge to be the most important heritage - even if they take different routes to the same objective.

a) Heritage as Content: nurturing a living memory.

Besides being old and significant in the same way as a train station or post office can sometimes be, most participants, all except former Mayor Marc Parent, thought that religious heritage possesses additional qualities compared to secular heritage, citing the personal contributions made by their pious ancestors; its function in important life milestones such as baptism, marriage, and

funerals; as well as its role as witness to important collective events, such as the Great Rimouski Fire of 1950, which it blocked from spreading to the city's east end.

In the eyes of the most practising layperson participant, Jean-Charles Lechasseur, the best way to honour the cathedral's heritage was to keep it as the city's religious centre: "there is something alive in the cathedral that attracts people to it. What is important to see is on the human level. On the level of a society, we are throwing the baby out with the bath water"⁵²². For Lechasseur, whether people believe or not is of little importance. He highlighted the fact that cathedrals have always had a triple vocation: worship, education and culture, which mutually reinforce one another, together creating a "current of transmission" for humanistic, national, and sacred values. Another proponent of religious heritage as content was essayist Gilles Le Chasseur⁵²³, who viewed religious heritage as any action, object, and building, which translates belief. Though Le Chasseur no longer practised, religious objects were nevertheless sacred because of the artistry, dedication, and sacrifice that went into their production and for the reverence they accumulated among the population over time⁵²⁴. Jacques Landry, Diocesan Coalition organiser, shared the opinion that age matters. By his logic, it made no sense to preserve simulacra of religion and newer churches when they had the real thing to save. He believed that the city's newer churches should be closed and sold to restore the cathedral and concentrate the city's religious life under one roof as the best way to respect religious heritage, which he viewed as ancestral filiation and artistic achievement:

Our ancestors lived and suffered to leave all this heritage. There were artists who made names for themselves and their magnificent achievements. When you enter

⁵²² See interview with Jean-Charles Lechasseur by Ryan Lux, February 7, 2020, 1 :45 :00 mins, original : « *il y a quelque chose de vivant dans la cathédrale qui attire les gens. Ce qui est important à voir, c'est sur le plan humain, sur le plan d'une société, on est en train de jeter le bébé avec de l'eau du bain* ».

⁵²³ No direct relation to Jean-Charles Lechasseur.

⁵²⁴ See interview with Gilles Le Chasseur by Ryan Lux, February 3, 2020, 50:00 mins., original: « *Ils sont des manifestations des croyances à travers les objets qui s'élèvent l'âme* ».

a cathedral, you see the greatness of the human being. That inside the man, there are spiritual values that run deeper than strictly money⁵²⁵.

For Landry, religious heritage was a source of transcendence made possible by history and filiation, and majesty, qualities he argued were not present in Saint-Pie-X or Saint-Robert. Likewise, Landry identified a spiritual quality to religious heritage, also noted by Lechasseur and Le Chasseur. The last participant who opposed desacralising the cathedral was the former mayor Éric Forest, who, like the others, believed that religious heritage should command respect for ancestors as well as concern for those to come⁵²⁶. Though almost all participants' ideal scenario, excluding clergy, would have been to maintain the status quo, some were more open to compromise the interior for projects which could self-finance the building's maintenance and assure its perennity, by new means, for another generation.

b) *Heritage as Container: Preserving a Glorious Past*

Both Kurt Vignola, historian and former development officer, and Pascal Gagnon, a historian and heritage activist, would have preferred the cathedral retain its traditionalist functions, but agreed that some kind of transformation was the only practical way to preserve visual vestiges of Rimouoski's religious heritage. Vignola conceived of religious heritage as monuments of past collective efforts achieved by a society with far fewer resources than Quebeckers wield today. Beyond the cathedral itself, Vignola proposed viewing religious heritage as a national visual ensemble.

⁵²⁵ See interview with Jacques Landry, February 7, 2020, 31:00 mins., original: « *Nos ancêtres ont vécu et enduré, façonnant toute l'orientation de cet héritage. Certains artistes se sont fait un nom et ont créé des œuvres magnifiques, et, lorsque vous entrez dans une cathédrale, vous voyez la grandeur des êtres humains. Il existe en l'homme des valeurs spirituelles qui sont bien plus profondes que l'argent* ».

⁵²⁶ See interview with Éric Forest by Ryan Lux, February 25, 2020, 31:30 mins., original: « *C'est clair pour moi que c'est important. On a le devoir de mémoire. Donc, il faut que les générations qui suivront soient conscientes de l'impact de nos institutions que le patrimoine religieux laissait à Rimouski* ».

[Churches] create a certain rhythm to the landscape. You pass from one church to another and what you see offers a lot of indications about the way different groups live in common. In many places, if you lose the church, there would be nothing ancient left⁵²⁷.

Comparing Québec's religious heritage to the significance of chateaux for France (as nearly every participant did), Vignola emphasised that the universal presence of Catholic churches across Québec's territory plays an important role in maintaining a collective national memory and visual grammar. Gagnon likewise emphasised religious heritage's presence at the heart of Québécois' identity:

the idea is that a building like this, as we see in Rimouski, it unleashes passions. We know that there is an attachment towards the building; there is the link there, which is very strong for Rimouski. When we are in front of the cathedral, we know that we are at home, so it is really the symbol par excellence for the City of Rimouski.⁵²⁸

Having lived outside of the province for several years, Gagnon noticed a difference between social attachment to religious heritage in Québec compared to the rest of Canada, where a church closure might garner a headline or two but does not hit the same identitary nerve⁵²⁹. In Québec, churches close differently because of their unique heritage caché, which, for institutional civil society, is explained by the incredible human investment they represent. So, for both men, who find

⁵²⁷ See interview with Kurt Vignola by Ryan Lux, February 4, 2020, 1:01:30 mins., original: « *Elles créent un certain rythme au paysage. On se promène d'une église à l'autre et on voit une église et ça donne beaucoup d'indications sur la façon qu'on habite en commune. Dans beaucoup d'endroits, si on perd l'église, il ne resterait rien d'ancien* ».

⁵²⁸ See interview with Pascal Gagnon by Ryan Lux, February 7, 2020, 8:45 mins., original: « *l'idée c'est un bâtiment comme ça, on voit à Rimouski, ça déchaîne les passions. On sait qu'il y a un attachement envers le bâtiment; il y a le lien-là qui est très fort pour Rimouski. Quand on est en face de la cathédrale, on sait qu'on est chez nous, alors c'est vraiment le symbole par excellence pour la Ville de Rimouski* ».

⁵²⁹ *Idem.*, 32:00 mins., original: « *Je pense que ça frappe ici plus l'imaginaire. Ailleurs, il y a beaucoup de communautés religieuses; si on ferme une église parmi d'autres peut-être il y a moins d'impact pour l'ensemble de la communauté. Ici au Québec la forte majorité est catholique, alors quand on ferme une église catholique, en plus quand on ferme une cathédrale ça a un impact majeur. Il va frapper l'imaginaire parce que c'était vraiment partie intégrante de l'histoire de l'ensemble de la communauté* ».

themselves somewhere in between the clergy, who definitely wanted nothing to do with the cathedral, and those who hoped to retain the cathedral's religious vocation at any cost, religious heritage is a powerful symbol, but one that can exist from a secular perspective owing to the building's exterior, cultural capacity, and historical reference.

c) *Heritage as Values: A Dissonant Sense of Triumph*

The clergy appreciated the cathedral's historic value and remembered it fondly when its pews were full but the cost of maintaining religious heritage reached a point where it outweighed its spiritual benefits. In fact, some clergy saw Quebeckers' reactions to closures as revelation: a provoked, thus rare, demonstration of affinity for the Church and a signal of Quebeckers' maturity in their readiness to take on the responsibility for the heritage Cultural Catholics deem so indispensable.

Abbé Gérald Roy explained the growing interest in Québec's religious heritage, observing that:

in the soul of Quebeckers, in the depths of their souls, there is still a great religious feeling, and this feeling is symbolised by the churches. They are attached to their childhood churches that remind them of many events. It was the place of gathering. It has remained like that for many people, but it is less present among the younger generation⁵³⁰.

Nevertheless, both Abbé Roy and Abbé Lagacé agreed that managing buildings was not what called them to the priesthood and that it was not fair for the five to 10 per cent of practising Catholics to finance a resource drawn on by all of society. Abbé Lagacé viewed the particular

⁵³⁰ See interview with Abbé Gérald Roy by Ryan Lux, February 6, 2020, 53:00 mins., original: « *Je pense que, dans l'âme des Québécois au fond de leurs âmes, il y a encore un grand sentiment religieux et ce sentiment-là c'est symbolisé par les églises. Ils sont attachés aux leurs églises d'enfance qui leur rappelle le batteur, beaucoup d'événements. C'était le lieu de rassemblement. Dans le tronc où il y avait par des télévisions, le lieu de rassemblement était l'église et le prêtre était important, c'est resté comme ça pour plusieurs ça s'en va avec la jeune génération* ».

attachment of non-churchgoers to religious heritage as a telling indication of the resilience of the French-Canadian ethnic identity⁵³¹, arguing that

it was the Church that allowed the Quebec people to keep the French language, to keep their unity, not to lose their identity, even for those who say they are non-believers, I say especially non-practising. We see that they are indifferent to practice, but they are not indifferent to their identity⁵³².

In a similar vein, Abbé Lagacé explained that he understood religious heritage as an important resource for non-practising Quebeckers.

It is the memory that reminds us of what our ancestors did. It is alive even if they are buildings and religious heritage is the most beautiful of all. It was paid for by communities that gave up their bread and sugar. It was said that there is nothing too beautiful for the glory of God⁵³³.

Like those who opposed desacralising the cathedral, the priests interpreted religious heritage as artistic achievement, ancestral connection, and reminders of pious sacrifice. They also observed that past generations' sacrifices, combined with contemporary indifference, have saddled them with an overwhelming burden, which compromises their ability to promote core religious values through pastoral care. Thus, despite nuances, most participants agreed that religious heritage was fundamental to Quebec's national identity and even more so for Rimouski's local and regional memory. They differed only about what is possible to preserve in terms of both values and architecture, in what contexts, and who should pay for it.

⁵³¹ As opposed to the supposed civic *Québécois* identity forged in the 1960s and which discursively eclipsed the French-Canadian reference in the 1970s.

⁵³² See interview with Abbé Guy Lagacé by Ryan Lux, February 6, 2020, 29:00 mins., original: « *C'était l'Église qui a permis au peuple québécois de garder le français, de garder leur unité, de ne pas perdre l'identité, même pour ceux qui se disent non-croyant, je dis surtout non-pratiquant. On voit qu'ils sont différents, mais n'est pas indifférent de leur identité* ».

⁵³³ *Idem.*, 23:00 mins., original: « *C'est le mémoire qui nous rappelle ce que nos ancêtres ont fait. C'est vivant même s'ils sont des bâtisses. Le patrimoine religieux, c'est ce qui est de plus beau. Ce sont des communautés qui ont donné de leur pain et de leur sucre. On disait qu'il n'y a rien de trop beau pour la gloire de Dieu* ».

3. *Cultural Change: a multivocal account of a shared narrative*

As with history and memory, participants' perspectives on the role of cultural change and church closures differed only by degrees, reflecting the hegemony of Quebec's master historical narrative of pre-1960 clerical domination or the Great Darkness, followed by the liberalising effects of the Quiet Revolution, and contemporary anxieties about the future surrounding a loss of social solidarity⁵³⁴. But they mobilise this shared narrative differently in regards to church closure. To convey the change in mentalities towards the Church before and after the Quiet Revolution, Gilles Le Chasseur elicited the reception of Cardinal Émile Léger on his return from Rome in 1953. Le Chasseur quoted the newly anointed cardinal, who when addressing tens of thousands at Montreal's Windsor Station said, "Montreal, oh my city, you made yourself beautiful to receive your prince!"⁵³⁵. He explained that Quebec society before the Quiet Revolution was like a theocracy, but one that reflected the cultural mores of the period. Abbé Gérald Roy remembered the pre-Quiet Revolution period in much the same way. On the one hand, he conceded the period's authoritarian nature: "There was the mayor and the archbishop; they were the two ... You couldn't oppose the Church in Rimouski from the outside. The Church was an integral part of life for the people of Rimouski"⁵³⁶. Indeed, far from oppressive, he insisted that the Church was largely a benevolent force which energetically served French-speaking Quebecers according to their values. He mused that some people might confuse the Church's social omnipresence with

⁵³⁴ See E.-Martin Meunier & Jean-Philippe Warren, *Sortir de la « Grande noirceur » : L'horizon « personnaliste » de la Révolution Tranquille*, Quebec City, Les Éditions Septentrion, 2002.

⁵³⁵ See interview with Gilles Le Chasseur by Ryan Lux, February 3, 2020, recording II, 1:15 mins, original: « Montréal, ô ma ville, tu as voulu te faire belle pour recevoir ton prince! ».

⁵³⁶ See interview with Abbé Gérald Roy by Ryan Lux, February 6, 2020, 28:00 mins., original: « Il y avait le maire et l'archevêque, c'était les deux ... On ne pouvait pas contrer le côté de l'Église à Rimouski en dehors de l'Église. L'Église faisait partie intégrante de la vie des Rimouskois et des Rimouskoises ».

omnipotence, though everyone I spoke with acknowledged the Church's crucial role in providing social services and founding important institutions.

a) *Quiet Revolution: 1960-1970*

The Church's social centrality began to oscillate in the 1960s with the dawning of both the Quiet Revolution and Vatican II – twin movements of modernisation. Abbé Roy, who was studying at the seminary during the 1970s, recalled the new reality facing clergy:

society was no longer in the Church's grip. [Laypeople] took their institutions; that was right. Perhaps the Church didn't know how to find its place in this new world and withdrew into the sacristy, into the liturgy if you like, but I think it didn't know how to influence the change⁵³⁷.

Mayor Marc Parent grew up in Rimouski during the 1970s and 1980s and despite the cultural and liturgical revolutions of the 1960s, he still remembered the clergy, and especially the archbishop, being treated with reverence and could never have imagined the present insubordination. Citing the tenor of public discourse as one example of contemporary changes as viewed through the cathedral dossier, Parent remarked that “never, never, never would the citizens have spoken against the archbishop at that time”⁵³⁸.

b) *Post-Cultural Catholicism: the Church of the Quiet Revolution's Great Grandchildren?*

All participants agreed that the looming loss of cultural Catholicism, manifested by the inescapable consequences of the cathedral's closure, represented a shift in the register of loss for Rimouskois,

⁵³⁷ See interview with Abbé Gérald, *Op. Cit.*, 30:00 mins., original: « la société n'est plus en main. Ils ont pris leurs institutions, c'était correct. C'est que l'Église n'a peut-être pas su faire c'est de trouver sa place dans ce nouveau monde et s'est retirée dans la sacristie, dans la liturgie, si tu veux, mais je pense qu'elle n'a pas su influencer le changement ».

⁵³⁸ See interview with Marc Parent by Ryan Lux, February 4, 2020, 40:00 mins., original: « on lit les articles qui sont faits sortir, qui sont écrit à l'égard de Monseigneur et jamais, jamais, jamais en ces temps les citoyennes se seraient prononcée ouvertement contre l'archevêque ».

not just of religious practice and literacy, but more broadly in terms of a social order that gave more than it took from the city. Participants identified multiple factors leading to shifting intergenerational forms of religious identification (exculturation) since the Quiet Revolution.

c) *Lay Interpretations*

Pascal Gagnon argued that, as the secular sphere commandeered social welfare services, the Church's territorial divisions became less determinative on social life, so people no longer identified with the parish as their primary social unit⁵³⁹. He explained that, at one time, if someone asked where you were from, the first level of reference would be your parish and not necessarily your city. These religiously established territorial demarcations were progenitors of intragroup solidarity and extra-group rivalry that creatively fuelled social dynamics as they expanded or retreated. According to Gagnon, that aspect of cultural Catholicism was already a thing of the past by the turn of the last century. The Rimouski Church did not meet with serious resistance to the mass-fusioning of nine parishes and perhaps this emboldened it, with an exaggerated idea of ambivalence, to proceed to the lengths it did with its attempts to shed the cathedral.

Senator Éric Forest cast his lens on hyper-individualisation as the primary cause of Quebeckers' social distancing with their churches. Drawing on the popular term for the religiously conformist Duplessis era, known as *la Grande noirceur* or Great Darkness, Forest inverted the maxim; "we came out of the great darkness but, today we are blinded by the light; it is too bright. I think we are losing the meaning of community somewhat"⁵⁴⁰. Over the course of his political career, Forest

⁵³⁹ See interview with Pascal Gagnon by Ryan Lux, February 7, 2020, 37:00 mins., original: « *Le sentiment d'appartenance est beaucoup moins qu'il ait déjà été. On s'identifie plus à notre paroisse, on s'identifie plus aux nos villes, peut-être nos quartiers, mais l'identification à une paroisse, un lieu de culte comme une église, c'est fini ce temps-là* ».

⁵⁴⁰ See interview with Éric Forest by Ryan Lux, February 25, 2020, 45:00 mins., original: « *On sortait de la Grande noirceur, mais aujourd'hui, on est tellement dans la grande lumière qu'on est un peu aveuglé; c'est trop brillant. Je pense qu'on perd un peu le sens de la communauté* ».

noticed decreasing investment in the public sphere and increasing abdication of social responsibility. He lamented that, “we are in a situation where everyone has rights, but no one takes responsibility”⁵⁴¹.

Participants from the realm of institutional civil society, like those from the clergy, regretted, but accepted the loss of the cathedral in its primordial form given contemporary religious tendencies. History professor Kurt Vignola did not judge Catholicism likely to disappear in Quebec but was confident that its continued decline would deal a blow to local and national identities that are still, in many ways, grafted on to it. Looking to the future, he was most anxious about where future generations might turn to meet their sporadic spiritual needs, if not Catholicism⁵⁴². He thought the best way to save the cathedral was to find a new vocation that would attract youth and attach them, even if passively, to its historical and social meaning; “many of them have never set foot in a church. They don't have that reference so ... they don't perceive the social utility of a church, hence the interest in giving it a new function that will ... reinforce the lines of attachment”⁵⁴³. Both men hoped that such a transformation might inspire future generations' curiosity about Quebec's religious heritage; to transmit at least a trace of Catholicism's positive legacy. But in reality, it is so far removed from their reality that most youth do not see the point.

d) Clerical Projections

⁵⁴¹ *Idem.*, 44:00 mins., original: « on est dans une situation où tous les gens ont des droits, mais qui a de la responsabilité? ».

⁵⁴² See interview with Kurt Vignola by Ryan Lux, February 4, 2020, 1:29:00 mins., original: « On est à l'aise avec les valeurs catholiques, ces valeurs, on a vécu avec elles pendant toute notre histoire. On n'est pas à l'aise avec les valeurs de toutes Églises. L'Église catholique est beaucoup plus proche de modes de vie d'ici ».

⁵⁴³ See interview with Pascal Gagnon by Ryan Lux, February 7, 2020, 15:45 mins., original: « beaucoup d'eux n'ont jamais mis les pieds dans une église. Ils n'ont pas cette référence, donc ... ils ne perçoivent pas l'utilité sociale d'une église, d'où l'intérêt pour lui donner une nouvelle fonction qui va ... ramener les lignes d'attachement ».

Clergy and practising Catholics were more resigned to the cathedral's closure, clear-eyed as they were, having lived the constant ageing of their congregations for decades. Their regular and progressive experience of secularisation provided them with a more measured perspective to the phenomenon, desensitised them, perhaps, compared to the average Cultural Catholic who may have deftly convinced himself that things had not really changed that much, even if they, and everyone they knew, changed their practices⁵⁴⁴.

Abbé Guy Lagacé, who spent years working in schools catechising the generation of Catholics now reaching adulthood, questioned the future of the classic model⁵⁴⁵, which was already on life support, despite the familiar tidy appearances of church grounds and their rectories⁵⁴⁶. "It doesn't mean that they don't have faith, but it's no longer the faith of their parents or grandparents"⁵⁴⁷.

For this reason, he justified the Diocese's reluctance to invest large sums in preserving the cathedral's religious vocation, which Lagacé predicted will have little to nothing to do with future religious practices and would be obsolete in the space of two generations. While he was open to new forms of worship, Abbé Lagacé regretted that declining religious practice deprives society by engendering a worrying loss of social meaning and values among youth. Abbé Roy shared Abbé

⁵⁴⁴ As I had done until 2013 on a visit to Québec City when I realised the immanence of an unstoppable wave of church closures, a phenomenon which was basically theoretical to me at this point. Do not forget, throughout the first decade of the 2000s, especially in Eastern Ontario where I am from, most parishes were still well-attended, there were always a few vocations, the churches were all well maintained, and the clergy seemed young, early 60s on average but many in their 30s and 40s. I remember as an altar boy in the 1990s doing my headcount of the people at church, wrestling with the apprehension of something amiss. We still had first communion and confirmation processions of a hundred or so. When I first apprehended at around 12 or 13 years-of-age, the faint hint of systemic decline it was so destabilising to my worldview that I turned to repressing the shock with an anecdote-curated scepticism of a forthcoming sea change. I could not bear thinking about the implications. I imagine this is a widely shared experience among Cultural Catholics who practise sporadically but who associate themselves freely and fondly as Catholics.

⁵⁴⁶ Appearances can be deceiving. In my observational experience, churches can resist neglect for a longtime, but once surrendered, transform almost instantly.

⁵⁴⁷ See interview with Abbé Lagacé by Ryan Lux, February 6, 2020, 5:00 mins., original: « *Ça ne dit pas qu'ils n'ont pas de la foi, mais ce n'est plus celle de leurs parents ou leurs grandparents* ».

Lagacé's concern for religious transmission as well as his certainty that buildings like Saint-Germain cathedral were no longer religiously aligned to accomplish the task ⁵⁴⁸. When I was out for a quiz night at the pub across from the cathedral, I asked the patrons, mostly in their 20s, what they thought about investing \$10 million of public money to save the cathedral, and while none of them asked me what a cathedral was, which might happen among their cohort in Toronto, all of them said they would rather see the money spent on climate change, a more pressing issue for them. So, despite their divergence in religious attitudes, youth⁵⁴⁹ and the clergy views on religious heritage amount to the same thing – obsolete.

4. *Accepted Problem, Contested Responses*

Thus, all nine principal participants, as well as others, shared the same axiomatic understandings of Rimouski's history, memory, and master narratives. All agreed that Catholicism and the Catholic Church undeniably played an important role in local and national history. They, as most Quebecers over the age of 35, likewise supported the idea that heritage, and particularly religious heritage, played an important role in contemporary society. Though grass roots civil society, institutional civil society, and the clergy differed on their response to how: whether as 1), the content, or performance, of memory, 2), its container as witness, or 3), a set of values. Moreover, all participants shared the same basic master narrative to explain the last 60 years of cultural change, drawing on the mythological architecture of the Great Darkness, the Quiet Revolution, and contemporary hyper-individualism. As such, the cathedral scandal was evidently not nourished

⁵⁴⁸ See interview with Abbé Gérald Roy by Ryan Lux, February 6, 2020, 37:30 mins., original: « *la jeune génération manque la cohérence. Ils n'ont plus les assises de base qui vont leur permettre les lignes de vie* ».

⁵⁴⁹ The specific attention to youth views on religious heritage is a weakness of this study which was nevertheless feasibly and methodologically beyond the scope of this effort. My ambition was to study people who had involved themselves in closure and there simply were not any younger than their late 30s, which correlates with the changes to the school system in the 1998 (de-confessionalisation), 2001 (cessation of catechism), and 2008 (introduction of the ethics and religious culture course).

by competing notions of identity or historiography. Instead, the conflict gestated more around notions of authority and leadership – a matter of democracy and governance.

C. Authority and Leadership: The Hot Potato Approach

In a large sense, the cathedral scandal stemmed from a crisis of authority. Because of the quality of its previous leadership, Rimouskois had little to rebel about before the closure of their cathedral. Even if it was on its last gasp, the status quo was working just fine. By 2020, all participants, including political leaders and clergy, cited the absence of meaningful leadership and the misuse of authority for inflaming division. This section will examine how participants from each domain (religion, civil society, and politics) assessed the use of authority by their counterparts.

1. Clerical Leadership

Beginning with the clergy, Mgr. Denis Grondin and his entourage of archdiocesan curia were the biggest targets of criticism by all participants, with the sole exception of Vicar General Guy Lagacé who maintained that the Church-citizen relations were good⁵⁵⁰. Everyone else disagreed. Their critiques fell into two broad categories addressing: 1), the archbishop's personal leadership deficiencies and 2), the difficult circumstances in which he found himself. Even Abbé Gérald Roy had to agree though his harshest critiques were aimed at circumstance.

He was appointed bishop in the middle of a disaster. Mgr. Fournier dies suddenly, and he must give answers immediately. He has no experience; he doesn't know the population and there is the influence of one and the other. I cannot throw stones. He's well-intentioned but doesn't lead at all⁵⁵¹.

⁵⁵⁰ See interview with Abbé Guy Lagacé by Ryan Lux, February 6, 2020, 21:00 mins., original: « *les rapports Église-citoyens, moi, je trouve que les liens sont bien. Au niveau de l'archevêché, on est très bien perçu, sauf qu'il y a eu d'incidents autour de la cathédrale* ».

⁵⁵¹ See interview with Abbé Gérald Roy by Ryan Lux, February 6, 2020, 1:02:00 mins., original: « *Il est nommé évêque en pleine catastrophe. Mgr. Fournier vient à mourir subitement, en plein problème, il faut qu'il donne les*

Though not exculpatory, everyone recognised the difficulty of the situation in which Mgr. Grondin found himself, including those unaligned with Jacques Landry's Coalition to Save the Cathedral - such as both mayors, Pascal Gagnon, and Kurt Vignola – who reserved their most pointed criticism for Mgr. Grondin's closest advisors: treasurer Michel Lavoie, Chancellor Yves Mélançon and project supervisor Jean Crépeault. Former mayor Éric Forest credited them with fostering “toxic leadership” at the bishop's palace, which functioned “regrettably outside of the rules”⁵⁵². Current mayor Marc Parent, blamed Mgr. Fournier's death for increasing Lavoie's influence over Mgr. Grondin, who Parent described as a “reed”⁵⁵³, was ill-equipped to resist. As for project supervisor Crépeault, Parent said that following his appointment he refused to come before council and when the mayor finally met with him personally after nearly two months, Parent found him to be

extremely abrasive and, of course, there will be no likelihood, according to his approach, of collaboration with the City of Rimouski...He had a few sheets of handwritten paper and no charts on the process whatsoever. I have no hope that Mr. Crépeault will deliver a solution in the short-term”⁵⁵⁴.

Kurt Vignola, who was commissioned by the Diocese to conduct public consultations, described the situation Mgr. Grondin found himself as “impossible”⁵⁵⁵. Regarding Grondin's personal

réponses tout de suite. Il n'a pas d'expérience, il ne connaît pas la population et il y a l'influence de l'un et l'influence de l'autre. Je ne peux pas lancer la pierre. Il est bien intentionné, mais il ne dirige pas du tout ».

⁵⁵² See interview with Éric Forest by Ryan Lux, February 25, 2020, 27:00 mins., original: « *On a malheureusement avec le départ de Mgr. Fournier un manque du leadership. On a un leadership plutôt toxique que rassembleur, entre autres avec certains individus ... On se retrouve six ans plus tard dans une situation qui ne fait que s'empirer, puis qui ne s'en va pas avec les règlements ».*

⁵⁵³ See interview with Marc Parent by Ryan Lux, February 4, 2020, 1:45 mins., « *Il y avait l'économe qui a joué un rôle extrêmement important, encore plus important avec le décès de l'ancien archevêque, remplacé par Mgr. Grondin, qu'on pourrait davantage le qualifier d'un roseau ».*

⁵⁵⁴ *Idem.*, 17:30 mins., original: « *extrêmement abrasive et bien entendu, il n'y aura aucune probabilité, selon son approche, de collaboration avec la Ville de Rimouski ... Il avait quelques feuilles de papier écrit à la main, aucune charte sur le processus à quoi que soi, je fonde aucun espoir en ce M. Crépeau pour livrer une solution à court terme ».*

⁵⁵⁵ See interview with Kurt Vignola by Ryan Lux, February 4, 2020, 3:30 mins., original: « *Il y a une guerre intestine à l'archevêché. Il y a le personnage de l'économe Michel Lavoie, puis c'est un individu qui a pour motivation la préservation de la caisse. Sa sensibilité au patrimoine est passablement nulle. Donc, lui, il a, peu près, fait tout possible pour conduire à une situation où le gouvernement avait à choisir entre subventionner l'église entièrement ou la démolir ».*

failings as leader of the Diocese, the moderate view of the situation is best expressed by Parent and Vignola. The mayor, Parent, criticised the archbishop for his inability to react quickly, to decide, and stick to his decisions”⁵⁵⁶. Vignola questioned the hierarchy’s decision to anoint him a bishop in the first place:

He must have been a good priest, but an archbishop is also a manager. It's about managing conflicts and personalities and public relations too. He's not a man who can decide and then move forward with that decision. He is fearful of everything that happens to the structures of the Diocese. His authority is absent. He has the title, but I'm not sure if, in the structure of the Church, he is capable of exercising the power he has to exercise⁵⁵⁷.

Less diplomatic assessments came from those striving to retain the cathedral’s primarily religious vocation, who throughout the scandal have found themselves in the Diocese’s crosshairs. Chief among these is Jean-Charles Lechasseur, who spent 36 years deeply involved with the cathedral, service which Mgr. Grondin apparently denied his face he had ever given.

When you have served the Church too well, you pay the bill. It's sad because there's a mafioso blackmail in this Church that I never thought I'd see or experience ... When you are part of a religious group, you don't have the right to speak. You must follow⁵⁵⁸.

His disappointment extended to the entire institution. Lechasseur expected that when the Apostolic Nuncio and Mgr. Marc Pelchat intervened to mediate that good sense would be restored to the diocese. Instead, Lechasseur described the experience as infantilising and cynical nonsense. The

⁵⁵⁶ See interview with Marc Parent, *Op. Cit.*, 25:00 mins., original: « *sûrement le leadership tombe sur les épaules de l'archevêque, mais il n'aime pas ça. Clairement, Mgr. Grondin n'a pas le leadership requis pour avancer le dossier* ».

⁵⁵⁷ See interview with Kurt Vignola, *Op. Cit.*, 7:30 mins., original: « *Il devait être un bon prêtre, mais un archevêque, c'est aussi une gestionnaire. C'est de gérer les conflits et les personnalités, les relations publiques aussi. Ce n'est pas un homme capable de prendre une décision, puis d'avancer avec cette décision. Il est craintif de tout ce qui se passe aux structures de l'archevêché. Son autorité est absente. Il a le titre, mais je ne suis pas certain si dans la structure de l'Église, il est capable d'exercer le pouvoir qu'il a devoir à exercer* ».

⁵⁵⁸ See interview with Jean-Charles Le Chasseur by Ryan Lux, February 7, 2020, 46:30 mins., original : « *Quand on a servi l'Église trop bien, tu paies la note. C'est triste parce qu'on a un chantage côté mafioso dans cette Église que je n'aurais jamais pensé connaître et vivre là ... Quand on fait partie de groupes religieux, tu n'as pas droit au chapitre au niveau de parole. Tu dois suivre* ».

experience convinced him that for the hierarchy, “The main god is not God, it is money ... they are following the unwritten will of the bishops of Quebec and Canada”⁵⁵⁹. Blame for the cathedral scandal, however, is not the exclusive purview of Mgr. Grondin and his curia.

2. *Political Leadership*

According to all non-political participants, politicians at all levels of government have their share of blame to carry. Pascal Gagnon said if the Diocese was at fault, municipal and national politicians were equally culpable for allowing the scandal to drag on. More precisely, he cited incoherent heritage protection legislation, which was “almost never enforced”⁵⁶⁰. Locally, Gilles Le Chasseur observed that the City’s track record did not inspire much confidence. He pointed to the former Brothers of the Sacred Heart School, the city’s only primary public school until the 1960s, which was purchased by the City in the 1980s (renamed *Les Ateliers Saint-Louis*) for cultural programming, and which has been left abandoned to deteriorate for some 15 years⁵⁶¹. Vignola recalled when he sat on a committee with Parent in the autumn of 2016 when he was first named mayor and that the experience made it obvious that “he does not have a sensitivity towards heritage. He is more jet-set. He doesn't want to get involved, doesn't want to pay, and doesn't want to make decisions. He changes his mind”⁵⁶².

⁵⁵⁹ *Idem.*, 1:51:00 mins., original: « *le principal dieu, ce n'est pas Dieu, c'est l'argent ... ils s'inscrivent dans la volonté non écrite des évêques du Québec et Canada* ».

⁵⁶⁰ See interview with Pascal Gagnon by Ryan Lux, February 7, 2020, 24:25 mins., original: « *Il y a des bâtiments qui sont classés au Québec, puis ils s'en vont à la dérive, ça ne fait pas beaucoup de bon sens. Puis il y a d'autres qui ne sont pas classés qui mériteraient quand même qu'on les protégerait. Ça coûte cher conserver les bâtiments anciens; ça coûte cher aussi les démolir* ».

⁵⁶¹ See interview with Gilles Le Chasseur by Ryan Lux, February 3, 2020, 31:00 mins. recording II, original: « *les ateliers suggèrent mal la capacité de la ville à gérer un patrimoine aussi important que la cathédrale* ».

⁵⁶² See interview with Kurt Vignola, *Op. Cit.*, 9:30 mins., original: « *il n'a pas une sensibilité envers le patrimoine. Il est plus jet-set. Il ne veut pas se brouiller, pas payer, pas prendre décision. Il change d'idée* ».

3. *Civil Society Leadership*

Lastly, Rimouski's civil society was also targeted for its inability to cooperate, with Landry's group using its authority to scuttle institutional civil society's co-op Paradis project, on the one hand, and on the other for its inability to agree on its replacement. In a veiled reference to Coalition leader Jacques Landry, Vignola mentioned that

there are many conflicts of vision, but also of personalities ... We are not able to reach a consensus, and we lack leadership too. And it's sad because what it reveals is that we don't have real leaders in Rimouski⁵⁶³.

However, he likewise noted that the disarray in which civil society found itself was a product of the failure of religious and political leaders in the first instance, leaving laypeople to shoulder a responsibility foreign to them. Essayist Gilles Le Chasseur saw it from a different angle. He believed that generalised apathy was what enabled the issue to deteriorate in the first place: "[t]he silent majority established itself in Rimouski and since that time the authorities have taken advantage of it"⁵⁶⁴. Along with Le Chasseur, Landry did not see his activism as sowing division. Instead, his motivation to challenge the original and well-advanced plan to desacralise the cathedral was indeed to defend civil society's right to participate. He condemned the previous plan as a backroom deal involving only a handful of citizens. Insisting that his actions were aimed at rallying the widest variety of citizens to the table, he argued that

we have to protect it [the cathedral] and it doesn't come from one person, it doesn't come from one group, it takes the whole community to say that we are

⁵⁶³ *Idem.*, 39:32 mins., original : « On doit beaucoup de conflits de visions, mais aussi de personnalités ... On n'est pas capables de faire consensus, puis on manque du leadership aussi. Puis c'est triste parce que ce que ça soulève, c'est qu'on n'a pas les vrais leaders à Rimouski ».

⁵⁶⁴ See interview with Gilles Le Chasseur, *Op. Cit.*, 31:00 mins., original : « La majorité silencieuse s'installait à Rimouski et, depuis ce temps-là, le pouvoir en profite ».

going to protect our heritage. The citizens are not even aware; often it's just the kingpins who decide⁵⁶⁵.

If he could go back in time, Landry would have mobilised civil society when Abbé Roy first called for funding in 2011. On this rare point Abbé Roy and Landry agreed. Abbé Roy insisted upon his earlier argument insisting that Rimouski society abdicated its moral authority over the cathedral's destiny in preserving the cathedral, saying,

that's the problem: people say the Church should do this, that it should do that to protect heritage, but they forget that the Church is them, and if they don't give, the Church can't do anything. It is not a money tree. This is magical thinking. They say that Rome must pay for the repair of the cathedral, which comes up often⁵⁶⁶.

Pascal Gagnon thought the social will existed to rally behind the cathedral, but that first civic leaders need to generate awareness about the situation's urgency⁵⁶⁷.

4. *An Inability to Cooperate*

For each of the social constituencies – religion, civil society, and politics— leadership and use of authority was found wanting. Clergy received poor grades by everyone, including its own members, for cultivating a toxic environment at the Diocese and for personal failings of its top leadership. Politicians were criticised largely by both types of civil society for lack of foresight

⁵⁶⁵ See interview with Jacques Landry by Ryan Lux, February 7, 2020, 30:00 mins., original: « *Il faut qu'on la protège et ça ne vient pas d'une personne, ça ne vient pas d'un groupe, ça prend toute la collectivité pour dire qu'on va protéger notre patrimoine. Les citoyens ne sont même pas conscients, souvent c'est juste les kingpins qui décident* ».

⁵⁶⁶ See interview with Abbé Gérald Roy by Ryan Lux, February 6, 2020, 46:00 mins., original: « *c'est ça le problème, c'est que les gens disent l'Église devraient faire ci, qu'elle devrait faire ça pour protéger le patrimoine, mais ils oublient que l'Église c'est eux, et s'ils ne donnent pas, l'Église ne peut rien faire. Elle n'est pas l'arbre de sous. C'est de la pensée magique. Ils disent qu'il faut que Rome paye la réparation des cathédrales, ça revient souvent* ».

⁵⁶⁷ See interview with Pascal Gagnon by Ryan Lux, February 7, 2020, 25:00 mins., original: « *il y a encore beaucoup de travail à faire là-dessus pour changer l'opinion des gens parce qu'on a l'impression que c'est acquis ces bâtiments. On a toujours vit avec leur décor, donc on pense qu'elles vont toujours être là* ».

and political will. Civil society leaders blamed political and religious leaders for forcing them to take leadership they were not prepared to shoulder. Institutional and grassroots civil society criticised each other's leadership, with grassroots condemning institutional actors' lack of transparency, while institutional actors described grassroots leaders as obstructionist. But of course, leadership and authority were not the only considerations which determined the cathedral's destiny. Religious, political and civic leaders do not exercise their authority in a vacuum, but rather operate within multiple infrastructures and contexts, both ecclesiastical and religious (institutional dynamics); as well as political and legal (law and policy). Before analysing participants' perspectives on who should pay and their assessments of the conflict, it is important to first examine how they understand the religious and political structures that define actors' scope of action.

D. Institutional Dynamics: A Total Dismantlement

The scandal surrounding the cathedral's closure understandably was determined by the religious dimension, which, for Quebec Catholicism, was and remains highly determined by hierarchically regulated institutional dynamics. Four main factors structured the way in which the conflict unfolded. Beginning in 2007, Rimouski's nine parishes fused into a single mega parish, radically levelling local religious governance and identification. Secondly, two waves of closures led to a turf war where each church community found themselves in existential competition with the other, nourishing conflict. Thirdly, the cathedral conflict was structured by the realities of both declining and evolving religious practice, which clergy argued needed to be taken into account and that failure to do so could all but ensure the Quebec Church's total collapse. Lastly, was the cathedral's ecclesiastical status, which made its closure unlike any other in Quebec's, or Canada's for that matter, history. Together these four factors form a complex range of institutional

considerations, ranging from parochial interests to iconoclasm that converge on the cathedral question.

1. *Fusions and Closures*

Following the fusions in 2007, the most practising lay participant, Jean-Charles Lechasseur, observed a change in how the former parish communities functioned. He noted that because of a priest shortage, and the new concept of all churches belonging to the same community, some churches would offer morning Masses during the week, while some would give the weekday afternoon Masses; so

we went shopping; we went wherever we wanted, when we wanted. The tangible loss for the community was the direct attachment to its church, the building itself, so it became, without realising it, something where you don't know where you would be going to Mass⁵⁶⁸.

During the first year of the fusion, the new single parish operated nine churches. But, when the first three closed, as inevitably, they do follow a parish fusion, Vicar General Guy Lagacé recalled more heartache than outrage: “It was difficult for them. People care about their churches; they care about symbols, so there was some turmoil. There were people who stopped going to church because their church was closed”⁵⁶⁹. Lechasseur highlighted Nazareth Church as of the most tragic victims of this first wave of closures, a parish he describes as having been “effervescent”, but whose parishioners have largely been lost to the Church since its closure in 2008.

Someone who has been stabbed in the back; well, they're going to wonder for a while where they're going to go, but what happens is that, over time, is the people

⁵⁶⁸ See interview with Jean-Charles Lechasseur by Ryan Lux, February 7, 2020, 6:30 mins., original: « *on allait magasiner, on allait où on veut, comme on veut. La perte tangible pour la communauté, c'est l'attachement direct à son église, bâtie-là, donc ça devenait, sans se rendre compte, quelque chose où on ne sait pas où on irait à la messe* ».

⁵⁶⁹ See interview with Abbé Guy Lagacé by Ryan Lux, February 6, 2020, 3:45 mins., original: « *Ça s'est passé difficilement pour les autres. Les gens tiennent à leurs églises; ils tiennent aux symboles alors, il y avait des remous. Il y avait des gens qui ont cessé d'aller à l'église parce que leur église a été fermée* ».

of that community are going to disappear from our churches, the vast majority of them young people who used to attend in large numbers. This is a bereavement because we had staked a lot on this community⁵⁷⁰.

2. *Les Guerres de clochers or “Turf Wars”*

When, in 2015, the Parish initiated a second wave of closures, tensions began to mount with each local community determined to save its church. Lechasseur explained that the remaining churches each had distinct identities and ways of doing things, which would make further fusions even more painful. For example, Saint-Robert served a working-class population; Saint-Pie-X had more of a bourgeois clientele, Sacré-Coeur is less tied to class but is cherished by its local extra-urban community at the far western extremity of the city. This left Sainte-Yves and Sainte-Agnès vulnerable to closure. Taking this into account, Lechasseur accused the Diocese of stoking a turf war⁵⁷¹.

A turf war was inevitable, according to former Mayor Éric Forest. He said his position had always been that in 2014, with 1,000 practising Catholics, Rimouski only needed one church, given that a person can drive from one end of Rimouski to the other in 15 minutes and that within a four-minute radius Rimouski had the cathedral, Sacré-Coeur, Saint-Robert, and Saint-Pie-X, following the closures. He also understood how difficult it can be to close churches⁵⁷².

⁵⁷⁰ See interview with Jean-Charles Lechasseur, *Op. Cit.*, 10 :00 mins., original : « *Quelqu'un qui s'est juste poignardé dans le dos; bon, ils vont se questionner un certain temps où ils vont aller, mais ce qu'il va faire avec le temps, c'est que les gens de cette communauté vont disparaître de nos églises, pour la grande majorité les jeunes qui participaient nombreux. Ça, c'est un deuil parce qu'on avait mis beaucoup sur cette communauté* ».

⁵⁷¹ *Idem*. 12:30 mins., literal translation: “The war of the steeples begins”. The expression usually means turf wars between neighbourhoods which were each associated with a parish church, but in this instance, it is doubly significant in that in this instance the very steeples of the neighbourhoods are in competition.

⁵⁷² See interview with Éric Forest by Ryan Lux, February 25, 2020, 24:00 mins., original: « *On peut comprendre que ça s'est fait à Sainte-Odile et qu'on ne veut pas que ça se fasse à mon église. Nazareth a fermé son église avec certaines appréhensions, mais ça s'est fait quand même, et ça, en plus, doit être fait avec du leadership* ».

Coalition leader Jacques Landry believed that, on a human level, it was only natural for people to want to preserve their parish churches and insisted that it was unacceptable to settle a local *guerres de clochers* by closing and selling the archdiocesan cathedral. He explained that his organisation “never pushed for the closure of the other churches because we focus on the cathedral. [The clergy] are the ones who have to clean up their act, except they don't want to”⁵⁷³, said Landry, who added that the Parish had a number of opportunities to sell one or more churches to the City and the school board, which could have shored up finances and perhaps have helped to avoid some competition between churches.

3. *Religious Practice: Closure-Accelerated Decline*

Participants offered various explanations for Rimouski's declining religious practice⁵⁷⁴ and how the cathedral's fate should figure into a response to it. Vicar General Guy Lagacé, who wrote a doctoral thesis which deals with strategies to navigate religious change, believed that declining religious practice is part of broader cultural and sociological changes underway across Quebec since the 1960s. Abbé Lagacé suggested that for religion, these broad shifts translated into a new configuration where “people became more aware that faith was a personal matter. While the institution was losing more and more credibility, there was also liberation, a paradigm shift, and a change in values”⁵⁷⁵. Most of the decline had taken place since he was first appointed to the cathedral in 1970 when, as Abbé Lagacé recalled, there were still five masses each Sunday and the city's newer churches⁵⁷⁶, only recently been built, had massively increased the city's church

⁵⁷³ See interview with Jacques Landry by Ryan Lux, February 7, 2020, 17:00 mins., original: « *On n'a jamais poussé pour la fermeture des autres églises pour se concentrer sur la cathédrale. C'est eux qui doivent faire leur ménage, sauf qu'ils ne veulent pas faire le ménage* ».

⁵⁷⁴ At least that of its overwhelming Catholic residents.

⁵⁷⁵ See interview with Abbé Lagacé, *Op. Cit.*, 1:30 mins., original: « *Les gens devenaient plus conscients que la foi, c'est quelque chose de personnel. L'institution perdait de plus en plus sa crédibilité, mais il y a aussi la libération, le changement de paradigme, le changement des valeurs* ».

⁵⁷⁶ Saint-Pie-X (1965) and Saint-Robert (1960).

capacity by 1,550 places⁵⁷⁷. Even when he returned to the cathedral in 2006, Abbé Lagacé said it was still a lively place. Part of his duties was pastoral care for school-aged children and that year there were 850 students enrolled in catechism classes – in 2020 that number fell to just more than 300, and Abbé Lagacé did not see the trend changing anytime in the near or medium future⁵⁷⁸. According to the Vicar General, less and less of religious life was being carried out as it once was, asserting that today “you don't need big churches to have faith”⁵⁷⁹.

Essayist Gilles Le Chasseur shared Lagacé's premise of decline but not his conclusion:

[a]s with service branches, when the consumers are missing, the service would be closed. It's the return of the pendulum, so let's close them, let's reopen the cathedral because it's the first church in the diocese. It's fundamental that we keep the cathedral; that we close the other buildings⁵⁸⁰.

Historian and consultation chair Kurt Vignola argued the problem runs far deeper than which buildings to keep and which to sell because it is virtually impossible to sell five churches at once anywhere, much less a small market like Rimouski. Instead, Vignola contended that the local clergy have known for at least 20 years that religious practice was in permanent decline and should have formulated a long-term plan then. Vignola observed that

the impression is that they are not able to manage their finances. They are people who have mismanaged their financial assets. They didn't heed advice. They

⁵⁷⁷ See « Annexe 2, Pour assurer la poursuite de la mission de la paroisse St-Germain : Rapport du Comité aviseur », Saint-Germain-de-Rimouski Parish Advisory Committee, November 8, 2014, p. 28, 32, (web), consulted April 8, 2020, http://www.diocesarimouski.com/riki/pdf/rapport_comite_aviseur_2014-annexes.pdf.

⁵⁷⁸ *Idem.* 6:30 mins.

⁵⁷⁹ *Idem.*, 43:00 mins., original: « Tu n'as pas besoin des grandes églises pour d'avoir la foi. Mais, c'est le peu d'intérêt qu'on porte sur nos églises qui signifie, bien, qu'on est en train de voir une certaine mort ».

⁵⁸⁰ See interview with Gilles Le Chasseur by Ryan Lux, February 3, 2020, 10:00 mins., original: « D'après la façon des points de services, quand on manque les consommateurs, on fermerait le service. C'est le retour du pendule, donc on les ferme. Allez réouvrir la cathédrale parce que c'est la première église du diocèse. C'est fondamental qu'on garde la cathédrale; qu'on ferme les autres bâtisses ».

preferred to save face, to refuse to send a signal of weakness, that they are disappearing, but they are going to disappear nevertheless⁵⁸¹.

Vignola perceived the clergy's insistence on transferring cathedral operations to Saint-Pie-X was less about responding to falling religious practice and more about anticipated financial savings because Saint-Pie-X was newer, smaller, and eligible for heritage funding. However, he was sceptical whether the Diocese's gamble would ultimately make much difference.

Abbé Gérald Roy saw Saint-Pie-X, however, as more than just a way to save money, but also offered logistical and liturgical reasons for sacrificing the cathedral and keeping what Le Chasseur would call a branch location or a franchise. Abbé Roy explained that the cathedral was designed for the traditionalist liturgy, making it difficult to encourage warmer more participative Masses called for by Vatican II. In addition, he complained the nave was too long and with difficult acoustics, whereas Saint-Pie-X and Saint-Robert were designed and built during Vatican II, on a smaller scale (slightly), and are thus better suited to current religious practices. He wondered if it made much sense to sell the two churches, which corresponded to the needs of the new liturgy, to invest in one that does not. Moreover, he worried that within the space of a couple of generations there would not be the capacity to maintain the massive church when he suspected future religious practice will likely require no churches at all but instead express itself in pastoral works. Regarding the future, Abbé Roy mused,

on the religious level, the Church's pastoral action is its salvation. That is where it will be reborn. If pastoral efforts become stronger, there would also be social effects. I think that the Church should go in the direction of charity, of poverty, of helping people wounded by life. That's where it would restore its credibility.

⁵⁸¹ See interview with Kurt Vignola by Ryan Lux, February 4, 2020, 49:30 mins., original: « *On dirait que l'impression c'est qu'ils ne sont pas capables de gérer leurs finances. Ce sont les gens qui ont, malgré leur patrimoine financier. Ils n'ont pas suivi le conseil. Ils ont préféré de garder leur face, ne pas donner un message qu'ils sont en train de disparaître, mais ils vont disparaître d'un coup* ».

It seems that it's when it has returned to this base, when the Church seems to be dying, that it can be reborn⁵⁸².

But that combat, Abbé Roy regretted, will have to be that of the next generation's laity. He noted that he, along with most other priests in the diocese, no longer have the energy to wage another radical transformation of the Church. However, Abbé Roy worried about whether there will be a next generation to pass the torch to⁵⁸³.

Cultural Catholics and traditionalist Catholics rejected that position, insisting that a cathedral was not interchangeable with a parish church and that the future of the Church in Rimouski lay in continuity rather than a radical new conception of how Catholicism was practised. For people like Jacques Landry, Jean-Charles Lechasseur, and Gilles Le Chasseur, the cathedral was a vital resource for the future of religion in Rimouski.

4. *Ecclesiastical Status: The Cathedral Difference*

If one had to identify the single greatest impasse at the root of the scandal in Rimouski, it would be the ecclesiastical status of a Catholic cathedral and the Diocese's daring and unprecedented plan to usurp it by extending closure logic to its furthest possible conclusion. The move was unreceivable in wide swathes of Rimouski society, who had been taught to view their cathedral as a source of prestige and even the centre of a whole system of geography. In response to the audacious decision, the city's clergy have been accused of premeditation, mendacity and hypocrisy. Even now, well into the 21st century, the symbolic force of a cathedral in Quebec

⁵⁸² See interview with G rald Roy, *Op. Cit.*, 1:12:00, original: « sur le plan religieux, l'action pastorale de l' glise, c'est son salut. C'est l  qu'elle va rena tre. Si elle devient renforc e, il y aurait aussi des effets sociaux. Moi, je pense qu'il faudrait que l' glise ait dans la lign e de la charit , de la pauvret , de l'aide aux personnes bless es par la vie. C'est l  qu'elle redeviendrait plus cr dible. On dirait que c'est quand elle est rendue dans le soubassement, quand elle semble mourir, qu'elle peut rena tre ».

⁵⁸³ *Idem.*, 34:00 mins., original: « On a une  glise qui est pauvre, qui devient de plus en plus pauvre financ i rement, mais aussi en termes de personnes d'esprit. Bien s r qu'on essaye d'aider les la cs   rendre de plus en plus   la responsabilit  de leur paroisse, mais des la cs, bien souvent, ce sont des personnes  g es, fatigu es aussi ».

remains potent and reveals new possible insights with respect to cultural Catholics' rapport with the institutional hierarchy. Historian and heritage activist Pascal Gagnon explained that while people have become accustomed to parish church closures, the idea of a cathedral closing has so far been unimaginable⁵⁸⁴.

Many, like Jean-Charles Lechasseur, believed that desacralising the cathedral was tantamount to sacrilege and would rob it of its essence, in the name of preserving it, rendering it an empty shell. He failed to understand why reappropriating the building required its deconsecration, and blamed governments of all levels for succumbing to secularist discourses⁵⁸⁵. He pointed out that cathedrals have always had a triple mission, perfectly compatible with secular uses, and that before there was a city hall, all public meetings and events took place in the cathedral.

I see a triple consonant vocation. Not one more than the other, but three strong vocations in harmony to maintain the cathedral: art, religion, and community. In addition, the cathedral offers much more than statues; it is above all a place of life. It is necessary to reclaim it. All our governments say that before they give, they must desacralise it, but for me this is absurd⁵⁸⁶.

For Gilles Le Chasseur, a cathedral's particularity was found largely in its special design and important works of art, placing them in a different league than parish churches. He explained that

⁵⁸⁴ See interview with Pascal Gagnon by Ryan Lux, February 7, 2020, 34:30 mins., original: « *Une cathédrale, ce n'est pas une église ordinaire. C'est une église qui a une importance majeure, parce que, dans la hiérarchie qu'on leur accorde, la cathédrale Saint-Germain, il faut comprendre, est une des cinq églises mère d'un archidiocèse au Québec et, comme au sommet de la hiérarchie dans l'importance de l'Église au Québec; je pense que ça frappe d'autant plus l'imaginaire* ».

⁵⁸⁵ See interview with Jean-Charles Lechasseur by Ryan Lux, February 7, 2020, 1:59:00 mins., original: « *On dirait qu'on a horreur de reconnaître que c'est un lieu sacré. Personne, personne, personne n'aura gagné* ».

⁵⁸⁶ *Idem.*, 1:47:00 mins., original: « *Moi, je vois une triple vocation et en harmonie. Pas un plus que l'autre, mais trois fortes vocations en harmonie pour le maintenir: l'art, le religieux, la communautaire. En plus, la cathédrale offre beaucoup plus que des statues, c'est une place de vie avant tout. C'est une nécessité de la réapproprier. Tous nos gouvernements disent qu'avant qu'ils donnent, il faut désacraliser, mais, pour moi, c'est absurde* ».

“[t]he cathedral is a book. Other churches, the branch offices, have nothing special to say. They are strictly functional”⁵⁸⁷.

The two clergymen, both of whom served the cathedral for years, were less doctrinaire about its ecclesiastical status. Abbé Roy and Abbé Lagacé each expressed regret about the cathedral’s closure but maintained that it reflected contemporary realities. Abbé Roy explained that priests may seem out of touch with public opinion to many laypeople and especially non-practising laypeople who are only now confronting the Church’s situation. Abbé Roy understood that

[f]or many people in Rimouski, it is an honour to have the cathedral and to no longer have a cathedral or to use another, less grandiose church as a cathedral, it hurts. I find [this reaction] normal. It is a shame we've reached this point. As priests, we have evolved a lot with this mourning over the years⁵⁸⁸.

Abbé Lagacé suggested looking at the cathedral’s representativeness from another angle. For him the cathedral remains as symbolic in its closure as it was in its golden years:

what is happening demonstrates our fragility in Québec. The Catholic Church has become very fragile. Cathedrals are the symbol of the Catholic Church and its power. It used to be said that nothing is too good for God and his talent, so the cathedral was the most important thing⁵⁸⁹.

5. Two Unreconcilable Responses to a Church in Flux

For the reasons described above, institutional dynamics played a determining role in establishing actors’ positions on the cathedral. First, both clergy and parishioners acknowledged how painful

⁵⁸⁷ See interview with Gilles Le Chasseur, *Op. Cit.* 20 :00 mins recording II, original: « *C'est un livre la cathédrale. Les autres églises n'ont rien à raconter comme une succursale de n'importe quoi. Elles sont strictement fonctionnelles* ».

⁵⁸⁸ See interview with Abbé Gérald Roy by Ryan Lux, February 6, 2020, 13:00 mins., original: « *Pour beaucoup du monde à Rimouski c'est un honneur d'avoir la cathédrale et de n'avoir plus une cathédrale ou d'utiliser une autre église moins grandiose comme cathédrale, ça fait du mal. Moi je trouve ça normal. C'est dommage qu'on soit rendu là. Les prêtres, on a évolué beaucoup avec ce deuil au cours du temps* ».

⁵⁸⁹ See interview with Abbé Guy Lagacé by Ryan Lux, February 6, 2020, 40:00 mins., original: « *Ce qui se passe montre bien notre fragilité au niveau du Québec. L'Église catholique est devenue très fragile. Les cathédrales sont le symbole de l'Église catholique et de sa puissance. On disait autrefois que rien n'est trop beau pour Dieu et de son talent, alors la cathédrale, c'était ce qui est le plus important. C'est le siège de l'évêque* ».

closures were and their role in alienating once active parishioners who tended to stop practising rather than join a new community once their church closed. Even for former parishes that remained open, the fused parish altered identification with a single church, which destabilised communities. Second, fears over a second wave of closures sowed fear and parishioners say it pitted local communities one against the other. Turf wars were exacerbated by the class differences and liturgical practices prevailing at each of the churches. Third, all participants agreed that religious practice was in decline, but long-time clergy distinguished between the diminished but stable configuration of the 80s, 90s, and 2000s, and the accelerated decline of the last 10 to 15 years. Abbé Roy and Abbé Lagacé believed that cultural Catholics (or grassroots civil society) did not appreciate the impact of this new situation on the structure of the Church because their non-practice meant they could avoid the reality. Institutional civil society leaders blamed the clergy for not creating and implementing a plan earlier when it was clear that the downward trend was not going to change. Clergy welcomed a new impoverished Church, less grandiose, placing more of an effort on pastoral care and considered the loss of the cathedral as emblematic of that transformation. In the same way that a death of a loved one can be experienced as a relief after a long illness, the clergymen seemed ready to move forward in a spirit of optimism for the future. Fourth and lastly, the special status of a cathedral was held up as inviolable by renegade churchwardens and grassroots civil society leaders alike. As central as it was to the cathedral's destiny, the institutional religious dynamics were only part of the structure, which framed the field of action in a church closure. More than other closures, Saint-Germain-de-Rimouski reminds us of a whole legal and political structure that governs how roughly 1,400 churches continue to be managed in Quebec.

E. Law and Policy

In addition to institutional factors, civil legal and policy dimensions are considerably important to an understanding of Quebec Church closures' social dynamics, which include considerations such as 1), heritage legislation which determines building protection and subsidies; 2), The Parish Law,⁵⁹⁰ which frames the organisation, legal liabilities, governance, and all civil aspects of parish life, and 3), official secularism (*laïcité*) – both legal and discursive – which seeks to organise the separation of Church and State.

1. *Heritage Status: An Opaque Bureaucratic Affair*

As described in the first chapter, Québec's Council for Religious Heritage gave Cathedral Saint-Germain of Rimouski the lowest possible score in 2003, making it ineligible for subsidies, while it simultaneously gave Saint-Pie-X, built in 1965, the highest possible score, and as such, aggravated the already existing animosity between partisans of the two churches. Jean-Charles Lechasseur believed the D-rating was strategic and that the designs were those of the Diocese's abnormally influential treasurer, Michel Lavoie. He called it the "Secret Plan", which he suspected dated back to the late 1990s. Describing the plan, Lechasseur insisted,

there was no way we were ever getting a penny out of him. All the cathedral ever got was the diocese's crumbs. He created a supposedly very objective, very tight assessment, which produced absurd results. He ordered those results to suit what he needed. He set up the evaluation grid using measures that would deliberately give us a failing assessment to prevent us from accessing subsidies. He knows how to pull strings left and right to put the parish in charge when he knew they would close it and when we took control of the parish, he took the power away. He has caused us nothing but problems⁵⁹¹.

⁵⁹⁰ Government websites translate *La Loi des fabriques du Québec* as An Act Respecting Fabriques, but Parish Law will be used for the sake of clarity. The law can be consulted online here:

<http://legisQuebec.gouv.qc.ca/en/showdoc/cs/f-1>.

⁵⁹¹ See interview with Jean-Charles Lechasseur by Ryan Lux, February 7, 2020, 31:00 mins., original: « *il n'y a pas question qu'on sorte un sou. Il faut qu'on mange tous leurs miettes. Il va avoir une évaluation soi-disant très objective, très serrée et quand on regarde l'absurdité de cette chose, il va commander ce qu'il faut. Il va mettre en*

Given Lechasseur's rancorous past with Lavoie, his views were hardly surprising; however, even Abbé Gérald Roy found the criteria dubious. In Abbé Roy's opinion,

“for religious heritage I think there has been an error of fact. Even if the cathedral was repaired in 1967 and underwent important changes, I think that these changes did not ruin the cathedral, but returned it towards its origins, its great Gothic lines”⁵⁹².

Abbé Roy believed that, by their very nature, all of Quebec's 19 cathedrals should be automatically given an A-rating, but especially Rimouski's given that it is the second-oldest cathedral in Quebec.

The consensus on the ineffectiveness of Quebec's heritage apparatus extended to the secular sphere. Kurt Vignola described the cathedral's heritage status as “absolutely ridiculous”, complaining that they would exclude Jacque Cartier's cabin if were altered by the addition of a single stone⁵⁹³. Another gap Vignola identified in Quebec's religious heritage system was the absence of literature that would help equip responsibly minded people to steward their local heritage. For example, offering people information on how to form a “save our church” committee and how to apply for grants and subsidies.

On the political level, mayors Forest and Parent each said they were constrained by the Quebec government's lack of recognition. While Parent claimed it was impossible for the City to invest in a religious building, citing Quebec's Bill 21 on secularism, Forest did not see a problem there in

place la grillée dévaluation, qui sera la mesure pour mettre une côte, pour nous faire soustraire le financement des subventions. Il va savoir tirer les ficelles à la droite et à gauche pour en charger la fabrique, que nous serons nous un peu plus tard. Il va nous causer de multiples problèmes ».

⁵⁹² See interview with Abbé Gérald Roy by Ryan Lux, February 6, 2020, 10:00 mins., original: « *Quant au patrimoine religieux, je pense qu'il y a eu une erreur de fait. Même si la cathédrale a été réparée en 1967 et qu'elle a connu des changements importants, je pense que ces changements n'ont pas brisé la cathédrale, mais l'ont retourné à son origine davantage, à ses grandes lignes gothiques ».*

⁵⁹³ See interview with Kurt Vignola by Ryan Lux, February 4, 2020, 21:45 mins., original: « *absolument ridicule. La vision actuelle du gouvernement est: si on retrouve une cabane inhabitée par Jacques Cartier, mais on a mis de la brique là-dessus, on ne va pas le classer. On ne comprend pas qu'un bâtiment peut évoluer avec le temps, on rythme avec l'évolution de la société. Les archevêques ont leur mot à dire aussi et, à Rimouski, ils étaient longuement opposés ».*

and of itself. Forest invested in the church at Le Bic while he was mayor and explained that if Sainte-Blandine, another heritage-designated church, had requested an intervention, he would have been obliged to offer the same support on the basis of equity. Therefore, for Forest, secularism was not so much the complete separation of Church and State, but rather a policy of not favouring one religion or church over another. However, it cannot be overstated how different understandings of official secularism were in 2011 than in 2017, when Parent became mayor. Before broaching the topic more deeply, though, one must first consider a law that is particular to Quebec Catholicism and which, in its own way, was among the first legislation framing the division of Church and State.

2. *The Parish Law*

The Parish law both endows Quebec's bishops with enormous powers, unlike those from other provinces, but at the same time protects parishioners by making the collectivity the legal proprietors of their church, likewise unique in Canadian or American Catholicism. Most participants felt, however, that the law did more harm than good. Jean-Charles Lechasseur said in all his years as an active Catholic he never thought much about the law because he never had to⁵⁹⁴. Though rarely used punitively, the law does provide for absolute ecclesiastical powers, which discouraged Lechasseur's optimism that the partisans of the cathedral could triumph over the Diocese, which had demonstrated a willingness to use the law to its fullest extent⁵⁹⁵.

The law traces its origins to a time following the Conquest of 1760, Gilles Le Chasseur explained that the Church made a pact with the British (The Royal Proclamation 1763) allowing French-

⁵⁹⁴ See interview with Jean-Charles Lechasseur, *Op. Cit.*, 2:05:00 mins., original: « *l'idée de la loi des fabriques à l'époque qu'elle a été faite s'est basée sur l'assomption que des évêques soient des bons gestionnaires, des bonnes natures, des bonnes personnes qui allaient agir au mieux pour la collectivité, pas des bandits* ».

⁵⁹⁵ *Idem.*, 2:00:00 mins., original: « *Ils vont gagner voyons donc, ils ont toute la loi des fabriques ce qui est quelque chose de toxique pour notre société. Ça fonctionne encore comme l'époque féodale* ».

Canadians to retain their religion and institutions in exchange for the clergy maintaining a docile population, a deal which Le Chasseur described as outdated “prostitution”⁵⁹⁶. Reform was demanded by liberal Catholics in the 1830s leading up to the rebellion of 1837, which explains why it is unique to Quebec. Local bourgeoisie insisted on having influence over parish budgets and won the right to elect members, churchwardens, to a parish council. Le Chasseur argued that “the churchwarden has only one role, window dressing, and appearance instead of being”⁵⁹⁷. The democratic aspects were an appeasement to reformers, but which did not ultimately change the authority structure. He highlighted the fact that if churches really did belong to collectivities as the law implies, the proceeds of church sales would go back into the community to fund social works rather than returning to the Diocese’s coffers.

Jacques Landry agreed that the law gives bishops far too much power and suggested that if the National Assembly had the courage, its abrogation would benefit not only communities, but the Church as well.

“They would not have the odious job of deciding everything. It would be the people who decide because it is their property. But the politicians have no appetite for change because they know that the bishops will not accept it”⁵⁹⁸.

Landry emphasised that his opposition to the Parish Law did not mean that he is anti-clerical and said that he knows of members of the clergy who share his opposition⁵⁹⁹.

⁵⁹⁶ See interview with Gilles Le Chasseur by Ryan Lux, February 3, 2020, 25:00 mins., original: « prostitution. Les gens étaient dominés par l'Église, mais on n'est plus dans ce temps-là, c'est fini. On a mis tout ça dehors en 1960 ».

⁵⁹⁷ *Idem.*, 26:30 mins., original: « Les marguilliers ont un seul rôle, c'est la frime, c'est dans le paraître au lieu d'être ».

⁵⁹⁸ See interview with Jacques Landry by Ryan Lux, February 7, 2020, 44:00 mins., original: « Ils n'auront pas l'odieux de tout décider. Il va falloir que ça soit la population qui décide, parce que ce sont leurs biens. Mais les politiciens n'ont pas le choix de changer parce qu'ils savent que les évêques ne vont pas l'accepter ».

⁵⁹⁹ *Idem.*, 45:00 mins., original: « Il y a des prêtres qui ont déjà identifié le parcours, qui sont sans reproche, puis c'est sûr qu'ils vivent les difficultés actuelles. Ils vivent ça difficilement, mais ces prêtres se sont relevés, les gens

Abbé Gérald Roy had a slightly different perspective of the law. Though he did not condone the Diocese's heavy-handed use of the Parish Law, he was mindful that ultimately, the Church is not a democracy, and that governance style is the bishop's prerogative⁶⁰⁰. In fact, Abbé Roy ventured that the cathedral scandal might never have become so divisive with two groups fighting for control of the parish council had democracy not escaped clergy influence at the parish level. Until recently most parish council presidents were the parish priests themselves and that their presidency naturally tempered the tenor of parish politics. But due to the priest shortage, that responsibility had to be delegated to a layperson to allow the priest to engage in pastoral work. The drawback for Abbé Roy was

that we have less influence in the parish council. When you have a parish council president who is diplomatic, who is conciliatory, who is a man of unity, it is good. But when you have a parish council president who is abrasive, who gets angry, who has a temper, even in the media, and [the priest] is left to mend fences...⁶⁰¹

Abbé Roy was clearly referencing Norman Lavoie, who went to war with Jacques Landry, something Abbé Roy said would never have happened if he had been presiding the Parish Council.

Pascal Gagnon was of two minds with respect to the Parish Law, but both views supported its reformation. On the one hand, he questioned its place in a secular society. Having the State regulating a single religion

vont vouloir ces prêtres-là, ce que je pense pour continuer, pour rebâtir et puis nos jeunes aussi, ils ont besoin d'avoir une lumière pour croire en certaines choses, de croire en un avenir ».

⁶⁰⁰ See interview with Abbé Gérald Roy by Ryan Lux, February 6, 2020, 59:00 mins., original: « *Quand arrivent de grandes décisions, ça dépend aussi de l'autorité qui est là. Quand l'évêque est une démocrate, il ne revendiquera pas toujours les décisions autoritaires comme Mgr. Fournier, Mgr. Blanchet, ce sont des hommes de démocratie qui écoutaient, ils faisaient des consultations. Mgr. Grondin est différent ».*

⁶⁰¹ *Idem.*, 25:00 mins., original: « *qu'on a moins d'influence au conseil de fabrique. Quand on a un président de la fabrique qui est diplomate, qui est conciliant, qui est un homme d'unité, c'est bien. Mais quand tu as un président de la fabrique qui est cassant, puis qui se fâche, qui est colérique, même dans les médias, et toi, tu es là et tu essayes bien de réparer les pots cassés... ».*

is, perhaps, not the right symbol of secularism. Eventually we will have to think about revising this law, in the sense that we should clarify the law more and then put more power in the hands of the laity, in the hands of civil society⁶⁰²,

in the way that every other faith group enjoys. On the other hand, the way the law creates sharp divisions between the clergy and the laity nourishes a different set of problems. According to Gagnon, “it’s a symbol. It’s the symbol par excellence for a secular State because the religious and civil constituents are so far apart and we can see what it does. It gives rise to lawsuits”⁶⁰³. So, in Gagnon’s eyes, the Parish Law both violates the principles of secularism’s collaborative dynamic and treats Catholics differently than other citizens; meanwhile it exaggerates the negative effects of strictly dividing Church and State by creating a social vacuum over responsibility for the provision of public religion.

3. *Official Secularism: Bill 21*

Mayor Marc Parent had a clear idea of what state secularism meant for Rimouski’s cathedral: no investment without desacralisation⁶⁰⁴. Gilles Le Chasseur disagreed. He believes that governments’ investment in certain churches

is very compatible because they are different things. Faith and practice are one thing, then art is one thing, and then heritage is another thing. But politicians are liars. In other words, they superficially rationalise; they instrumentalise outside discourse. Laicity has nothing to do with the cathedral⁶⁰⁵.

⁶⁰² See interview with Pascal Gagnon by Ryan Lux, February 7, 2020, 29:00 mins., original: « ce n’est peut-être pas le bon symbole de la laïcité. Éventuellement il va falloir penser à réviser cette loi, dans le sens où on devrait davantage clarifier la loi, puis remettre davantage de pouvoir dans les mains des laïcs, dans les mains de la société civile ».

⁶⁰³ *Idem.*, 30:00 mins., original: « c’est clair que c’est un symbole. C’est le symbole par excellence pour un état laïque parce que, là-dedans, le religieux, le civil sont trop éloignés, puis on voit ce que ça donne, ça donne aux poursuites ».

⁶⁰⁴ See interview with Marc Parent by Ryan Lux, February 4, 2020, 21:45 mins., original: « Une municipalité ne peut pas investir dans un lieu de culte. On n’a pas le droit. La charte nous interdit de favoriser une religion aux dépens des autres ».

⁶⁰⁵ See interview with Gilles Le Chasseur by Ryan Lux, February 3, 2020, 1:03:00 mins. recording II, original: « très compatible parce que ce sont des choses différentes, la foi, la pratique, ce sont une chose, puis l’art c’est une chose, et puis le patrimoine c’est une autre chose. Mais les politiciens sont des menteurs. C’est-à-dire qu’ils rationalisent superficiellement, c’est plutôt qu’ils font un appel au discours de l’extérieur. La laïcité n’a rien à voir avec ça ».

For Le Chasseur, who was politically and religiously active throughout the secularisation of Quebec's educational system during the Quiet Revolution, secularism – which he supported – was more about preventing religious authorities from influencing politics than politics never getting involved in religion⁶⁰⁶.

Abbé Gérald Roy agreed that secularising Quebec's education and health systems was beneficial to both the governance of Church and society but worried that secularist discourses have gone too far in recent years.

I do not agree that religion should only be lived, either in homes or in churches. I think it is part of religion to witness our values outside of the Mass. It is up to the Christians themselves to invest in this⁶⁰⁷.

So, for Abbé Roy, secularism's biggest threat was not so much some governments' reticence to invest in religious heritage, but rather the separation of religion and pastoral work from the public sphere. Vicar General Guy Lagacé, who worked for years as the school board's chaplain, supported secularism, but believed that Quebec's new course on ethics and citizenship did not teach students enough about religion and specifically about Catholicism, the religion of the vast majority, to the point where many youths were virtual strangers to their own faith. He posed the question, "does a good citizen have to put aside the whole religious dimension? I think we made a mistake"⁶⁰⁸. As with their perspectives on heritage, both priests worried that secularism's contemporary orientation

⁶⁰⁶ *Idem.*, 1:04:00 mins. recording II, original: « *l'espace public, nos institutions démocratiques, que ce soit la municipalité, école, santé; qu'il n'ait pas de gestes religieux dans la politique de nos institutions* ».

⁶⁰⁷ See interview with Abbé Gérald Roy by Ryan Lux, February 6, 2020, 57:00 mins., original: « *Je ne suis pas d'accord que la religion soit uniquement vécue, soit dans les foyers, soit dans les églises. Je pense que ça fait partie de la religion d'être témoin de nos valeurs en dehors de la messe. Il appartient aux chrétiens eux-mêmes de s'investir là-dedans* ».

⁶⁰⁸ See interview with Abbé Guy Lagacé by Ryan Lux, February 6, 2020, 37:00 mins., original: « *la question: est-ce qu'un bon citoyen doit nécessairement mettre du côté toute la dimension religieuse? Moi, je crois qu'on a fait une erreur* ».

stifled Catholicism's social existence, a loss which far outweighs the disappearance of buildings or retreat of institutional influence.

While clergy were more concerned about how secularist discourses and policies impacted religious sensibilities than religious heritage, Pascal Gagnon saw no incompatibility with the State investing in religious buildings while simultaneously banning religious symbols for public sector workers. He recommended that Quebec should look to France, the secularist State *par excellence*, which owns many of the country's most iconic churches. Gagnon argued that as religious practice continues to decline, along with parish coffers, the Quebec State should consider nationalising its most important churches, beginning with its cathedrals.

Often, they say, this is a church; we can't do anything, we can't. But really, it's funny, because a lot of small villages have bought their churches and they offer a mixed use. Very often there is still worship but also other vocations. So why can't it be done on a larger scale? Medium-sized cities? Why not be inspired by what is being done in smaller communities? Because it can be done, I am convinced. [Politicians] are instrumentalising Bill 21 to suit their interests⁶⁰⁹.

Kurt Vignola agreed but offered some additional precision on the distinction between religious practice and heritage in cases where they share the same space. He explained that it is perfectly secular for governments to maintain heritage churches, which is different than supporting the costs of religious services and personnel. Governments' refusals due to religious activities taking place inside heritage churches are "an argument for doing nothing"⁶¹⁰. For Vignola,

⁶⁰⁹ See interview with Pascal Gagnon by Ryan Lux, February 7, 2020, 27:00 mins., original: « *Souvent ils disent, c'est une église, on ne peut rien faire, on ne peut pas. Mais en réalité c'est drôle, parce que plein de petits villages ont acheté leurs églises et offrent un usage mixte. Très souvent, il y a toujours le culte, mais également des autres vocations. Alors pourquoi ça serait impossible à faire sur une plus grande échelle? Les villes de taille moyenne? Pourquoi pas s'inspirer de ce qui se fait dans les plus petites communautés? Parce que c'est faisable, je suis convaincu. Eux autres instrumentalisent la loi 21* ».

⁶¹⁰ See interview with Kurt Vignola by Ryan Lux, February 4, 2020, 1:11:00 mins., original: « *C'est plutôt un argument pour ne rien faire. Ici justement, le maire est incapable de faire cette distinction. Il n'est aucunement capable de distinguer le lieu civique, puis la fonction de pratique à l'intérieur* ».

[a] government is secular when it makes its decisions without reference to religion. This does not mean denying the existence of religion. It does not mean that it will outlaw it. It does not mean that it cannot carry out partnerships with religious organisations⁶¹¹.

Vignola offered a couple of concrete examples. While he agreed that opening legislative sessions with a prayer, as they do in New Brunswick is not secular, he saw no problem with keeping the crucifix in Quebec's National Assembly. Vignola argued that keeping the crucifix would have served as a reminder that, at one point, politics did submit to the Church and that it was widely accepted; retaining the crucifix should serve as a reminder to future deputies not to do so ever again⁶¹². So, while both institutional civil society actors support secular principles, they believe that it is shortsighted to banish relics of a religious past. Moreover, they insisted that it is incumbent on governments to finance religious heritage in a secularised society because heritage continues to inform civic identity. At the same time, they did not accept that religious use of these buildings violated Quebec's contemporary secular social contract.

Former mayor and current senator Éric Forest's conception of secularism was closer to Vignola's and Gagnon's than that of his successor Marc Parent. He explained that there is nothing inherent about religious heritage that disqualifies it from public support⁶¹³. Forest expressed a nuanced view of secularism, which he conceptualised as a way "to promote values that are not linked to any religion and are therefore of a civil nature, but this is not to say that these values cannot be

⁶¹¹ *Idem.*, 1:12:00 mins., original: « Un gouvernement est laïque lorsqu'il prend ses décisions sans se référer à la religion. Ça ne veut pas dire qu'il faut nier l'existence de la religion. Ça ne veut pas dire qu'il va la proscrire. Ça ne veut pas dire qu'il ne peut pas porter de partenariats avec les organisations religieuses ».

⁶¹² *Idem.*, 1:16:00 mins., original: « En le cachant d'ailleurs, c'est ridicule. Il y a beaucoup de gens qui sont incapables de comprendre l'histoire. On sait que c'est affreux de faire ça, mais ça nous dit qu'à quelconque époque on a estimé ces gens-là, puis ça fait partie de notre identité qu'on a faite cette erreur. Il faut savoir qu'on a fait des choses grotesques ».

⁶¹³ See interview with Éric Forest by Ryan Lux, February 25, 2020, 38:00 mins., original: « Je pense que ça fait partie de notre responsabilité comme société, comme culture ... Donc, il est à mon avis normal et correct de le faire, mais dans un contexte où les normes et critères sont clairs et que tout le monde qui répond à ces critères, soit accepté ».

conveyed or developed in a religious context”⁶¹⁴. In other words, religion cannot define public culture but can participate in it productively. Like Vignola, Forest did not see a problem with retaining the crucifix. He recalled that,

[f]or me, the crucifix in Rimouski, I didn't remove it because, yes, we adapted by saying, we don't pray anymore. We can each take a moment to reflect on our own beliefs and believe as you wish. But the crucifix, I didn't remove it because it's also part of our environment. We are a society in Rimouski that is very much influenced by religion⁶¹⁵.

Like Abbé Roy, Forest judged that current secularist arguments exceed the original aims of assuring that government was not influenced by the clergy and has instead become anti-religious⁶¹⁶.

4. *A Perfect Storm for Public Religion*

So, the civil aspects of church closure in Rimouski and, indeed, across Quebec reside in government heritage policy, judged by everyone involved to be problematic, as well as legislation that may no longer reflect Quebec's social reality. Although it does have democratising effects, participants felt that the enshrinement of Catholic affairs in law complicated church closures in Quebec. Whereas the democratic elements might have provided a bulwark for individual communities against ecclesial authority before the age of parish fusions, the territorial nature of this civil aspect is decided by unilateral decree in the bishop's palace. In Rimouski, the Diocese

⁶¹⁴ *Idem.*, 40:00 mins., original: « de faire les valeurs qui ne sont pas liées à aucune religion, donc qui sont d'ordre civil, mais ce n'est pas dire que ces valeurs ne peuvent pas être véhiculées ou travaillées dans un contexte religieux ».

⁶¹⁵ *Idem.*, 22:00 mins., original: « Pour moi, le crucifix à Rimouski, je n'avais pas sorti parce que oui, on s'adaptait en disant, on fait plus la prière. On va prendre un moment de réflexion selon vos croyances et tu vas réfléchir comme tu veux. Mais le crucifix, je ne l'avais pas enlevé parce que ça fait partie aussi de notre environnement. On est quand même une société à Rimouski énormément influencée par la religion ».

⁶¹⁶ *Idem.*, 23:00 mins., original: « un mouvement de masse, qu'il faut respecter, mais l'écart est accentué par les attitudes de certaines personnes qui ont démontré beaucoup plus de faire la fermeture que d'ouverture ».

manipulated democratic provisions to close the cathedral, given that its supporters' agency was submerged on a council dominated by the other churches trying to save themselves.

F. Politics: Who should pay?

Four general perspectives have emerged of who should pay: 1), Those of citizens expressed in the 2017 Léger poll; 2), those of the City; 3), those of the Diocese; and 4), those of civil society. While those of average citizens and the City have remained unchanged since 2014, the Diocese's position had evolved slightly since its original position by the time I arrived in town in 2020. While the civil society perspective was not monolithic with those acting in institutional capacities such as Pascal Gagnon and Kurt Vignola diverging from the opinions of the grassroots activists who rallied around Jacques Landry's Diocesan Coalition to Save the Cathedral.

1. *Citizen Perspective*

Recalling the Léger poll discussed in the previous chapter, citizens expressed an overwhelming attachment to the cathedral, 96 per cent; however, the results were likewise very clear that there was very little appetite for local financing. Chair of consultations Kurt Vignola interpreted the results to mean that citizens wanted financing to come from either upper levels of government or for the project to generate sufficient revenues to finance itself (or some combination of both)⁶¹⁷.

2. *Political Perspective*

Mayor Marc Parent emphasised that Rimouski's city council was extremely divided during his tenure, making it nearly impossible for the City to take decisive action on the cathedral. Previously, both Forest and Parent supported indirectly financing the cathedral's restoration by offering to

⁶¹⁷ See Kurt Vignola, « L'avenir de la cathédrale de Rimouski : Rapport de la consultation menée au printemps 2017 sur l'acceptabilité sociale des usages et des projets liés à l'avenir de la cathédrale de Rimouski », Archdiocese of Rimouski, June 19, 2017, (web), consulted April 8, 2021, https://www.academia.edu/36790740/Lavenir_de_la_cath%C3%A9drale_de_Rimouski.

purchase other strategically located churches, like Saint-Pie-X, and facilitating the sale of Saint-Robert to the school board⁶¹⁸. Parent believed that the Quebec government should have played a role in supporting religious heritage but “

this does not fall solely on the shoulders of the Quebec government. The reality is that the Church has large sums of money available that are not being made available for the preservation of heritage buildings⁶¹⁹.

The basis for Parent’s position was his responsibility to taxpayers and his constant refrain throughout his time in office was to insist that the Diocese take responsibility for its own building as would be expected of any other property owner. Former mayor and current senator Éric Forest was essentially of the same mind. In a meeting with Mgr. Denis Grondin, Forest, said he told the archbishop how abnormal he found the local situation.

I was saying that you really must give a signal to the community by asking the organisations to help, either the Seminary Foundation, the Langevin Foundation, or others, to contribute, and we are not talking about a contribution of \$200,000 or \$300,000. You must put in at least three or four million and then ask the community to make up the difference⁶²⁰.

Forest did not mince words with respect to how he felt the Diocese had shirked its responsibility for the cathedral while in possession of \$32 million in various foundations, yet

they do not spend a penny; it is revolting. And I say to myself as a member of the Christian community who no longer practices, I find it revolting because

⁶¹⁸ See interview with Marc Parent by Ryan Lux, February 4, 2020, 30:30 mins., original: « *Pour moi, ça aura été la solution idéale parce qu'elle n'impliquerait pas la ville de Rimouski, malheureusement, nous ne sommes plus dans cette orientation. C'est un bâtiment religieux qui a été délaissé par la religion et ce n'est pas aux citoyens de Rimouski de payer à nouveau pour ce bâtiment-là* ».

⁶¹⁹ *Idem.*, 35:30 mins., original: « *ça ne tombe pas uniquement sur les épaules du gouvernement du Québec. La réalité, c'est que l'Église a de grandes sommes d'argents qui sont disponibles et qui ne sont pas rendus disponibles pour la préservation des bâtiments patrimoniaux* ».

⁶²⁰ See interview with Éric Forest by Ryan Lux, February 25, 2020, 12:00 mins., original: « *je disais qu'il faut vraiment donner un signal à la communauté en demandant aux organismes d'aider, soit la fondation du séminaire, tel que Langevin, ou autre, de contribuer, et on ne parle pas d'une contribution de 200,000 ou 300,000 piastres. Il faut mettre au moins trois, quatre millions et puis demander au milieu pour combler la différence* ».

these funds that are at their disposal today came from the pockets of the poor people who built the Church⁶²¹.

Though Forest understood that the foundations are supposed to be dedicated to works such as supporting retired and aged clergy, he argued that there are fewer and fewer who require care and was suspicious about the foundations' management by non-clergy such as treasurer Michel Lavoie. He wondered aloud what is to become of the foundations once there are no more priests to care for. Even though Forest insisted the primary responsibility lies with the Church to care for Quebec's religious heritage, he saw a role for local and national governments to identify the most symbolically important buildings and support them⁶²².

3. *Clergy Perspective*

Clergy members, meanwhile, were of the opposite view. Both Abbé Gérald Roy and Abbé Lagacé believed that the Church had been disproportionately shouldering the burden of heritage buildings for decades, long after it was profitable to do so. Abbé Roy did not see asking the local population, practising or not, to contribute as asking them to pay twice for the cathedral. Instead, he said that the cathedral, like any other public building, requires significant repairs each generation and that part of the Parish's decision to unburden itself of the cathedral originated with the disappointing fundraiser of 2010-2011. Perhaps, he thought, Rimouskois would be more prepared to support the Cathedral if it was returned to them endowed with a new vocation. Abbé Lagacé agreed that a

⁶²¹ *Idem.*, 35:30 mins., original: « ils ne mettent pas un sou, c'est révoltant. Et moi, je me dis comme membre de la communauté chrétienne qui ne pratique plus, je trouve ça révoltant parce que ces sous-là qui sont aujourd'hui à leur disposition, ça vient des poches des pauvres contribuables qui ont fait bâtir ».

⁶²² *Idem.*, 34:00 mins., original: « et qu'on y investisse de façon structurante. Au lieu de vouloir tout conserver, mais en faisant des investissements qui ne permettent pas justement de conserver d'une façon de vraiment les mettre en lumière, moi, je suis de l'avis qu'il faut investir massivement dans certains sites au lieu d'essayer de sauver tous, mais pas en sauver un ».

significant contribution must come from Rimouskois themselves for any project to proceed⁶²³. Without that support, he warned the cathedral building will not survive⁶²⁴.

4. *Civil Society Perspective*

Unlike the opposing positions of the political and religious spheres, civil society participants' polarisation was more graduated. Both institutional and grassroots civil society groups embraced a mixed approach in which, notably, they both accepted the need to contribute and only differed on who should own the building. Of all civil society actors, grassroots pamphleteer Gilles Le Chasseur most reflected the positions of Marc Parent and Éric Forest in that he believed that Diocese was squarely financially responsible and very capable of restoring the cathedral. He believed that the clergy had a moral responsibility to pay based on the historical and contemporary financial relationship between Rimouskois and the Diocese. From Le Chasseur's point of view, Rimouskois had paid enough. He remembered his father explaining why, poor as they were, they gave so much to the Church, citing a proverb: "those who give to God are close to God; what God gives is a loan from God"⁶²⁵. He saw the Diocese's contemporary position as short-sighted and a betrayal to previous generations' selfless piety. More recently, Le Chasseur pointed to the campaign to raise funds to restore the bishop's palace, which collected a surplus of \$1 million, which the Diocese refused to invest in the cathedral, as an example of Rimouskois' generosity and the curia's greediness.

⁶²³ See interview with Abbé Guy Lagacé by Ryan Lux, February 6, 2020, 10:00 mins., original: « *il y a de belles possibilités pour en faire un lieu, une maison commune où il y aura une partie pour le culte, mais aussi une partie pour la culture, et d'autres projets. Mais pour la mise en place, c'est de penser à l'avenir, il faudra que la communauté de Rimouski on s'appuie* ».

⁶²⁴ *Idem.*, 26:00 mins., original: « *Je trouve que l'État ne fait pas assez pour conserver le patrimoine religieux du Québec. Nous sommes dans un pays nordique; les hivers sont durs sur nos bâtiments et il faut payer le prix pour garder notre histoire* ».

⁶²⁵ See interview with Gilles Le Chasseur by Ryan Lux, February 3, 2020, 38:00 mins., original: « *ceux qui donnent à Dieu sont près à Dieu, ce que donne Dieu est un prêt de Dieu* ».

Leader of the grassroots effort to save the cathedral from desacralisation, Jacques Landry said that hindsight is 20/20. He recognised that one only understands the value of what they have once it has been lost. Reflecting on the failed fundraising efforts leading up to the cathedral's closure, he said,

people in general, myself included, may not have been receptive because they did not see the importance of keeping the monument, of what it represented, so I don't know how it would have turned out, but if we take the same man [Mgr. Fournier] and the awareness that we have today, it's certain that it would not have taken long for it to be resolved⁶²⁶.

And while Landry accepted that civil society should contribute something, after all his Coalition had been working to facilitate this via subscriptions, fundraisers, and networking with local entrepreneurs, he also believed that the Quebec government had a major role to play, notably through the nationalisation of its most important churches. As for the Church, Landry believes they should be responsible, at a minimum for a contribution equivalent to the \$1.5 to \$2 million it would cost to demolish the cathedral. However, Landry also recognised that neither the State nor civil society had been able to intervene in the specific case of the Cathedral Saint-Germain. He argued that even when civil society and the State were willing to assume their heritage responsibilities, they faced obstacles. “What most threatens churches is the clergy. Surely the parishioners would be willing to rebuild all sorts of things, to maintain all sorts of things, except the clergy are putting the screws to them”.⁶²⁷

⁶²⁶ See interview with Jacques Landry by Ryan Lux, February 7, 2020, 34:00 mins., original: « *Peut-être que les gens en général, moi compris, peut-être qu'on n'aura pas été réceptifs parce qu'on n'a pas vu l'importance de garder le monument, de ce qu'il représentait, donc je ne sais pas comment ça aurait tourné, mais si on prend le même homme (Mgr. Fournier) et la conscientisation qu'on a aujourd'hui, c'est sûr que ça n'aurait pas été long pour que ça soit réglé* ».

⁶²⁷ *Idem.*, 53:00 mins., original: « *Ce qui menace les églises, c'est surtout le clergé. C'est sûr que les paroissiens seraient prêts à reconstruire toutes sortes de choses, à maintenir toutes sortes de choses, sauf le clergé met les bâtons. Il y a deux regards. Il y a des gens qui veulent maintenir leur standing, leurs positions et la maintenance de leurs appuis de contrôles. Et, il y a des gens qui sont peut-être plus sensibles à la population qui veut vivre vraiment des valeurs catholiques. Donc, il y a vraiment deux groupes au sein du clergé et le premier, c'était à l'avance au moment où le trouble commençait* ».

Jean-Charles Lechasseur's traditionalist point of view was close to Landry's in that he did not see the difference between which organism the funding came from, whether from governments, the Church or civil society because ultimately all three spheres englobe the same population⁶²⁸. Importantly, Lechasseur insisted that social peace can only be restored by forging a partnership between the Church, the City and civil society.

The more institutional civil society actors, Pascal Gagnon and Kurt Vignola, agreed that the lion's share of funding must come from upper levels of government; however, Vignola doubted governments would invest without Rimouski first demonstrating local consensus and initiative. Gagnon maintained that the State clearly did not contribute enough⁶²⁹ and suggested that Rimouski's peripheral location and status contributed to the Quebec government's political neglect of the cathedral⁶³⁰. Where Gagnon saw considerable room for improvement by the State, Vignola focused his critique on individual members of society.

People don't put money into collective projects anymore. So, there is a social disempowerment, and the government is the reflection of the society. It's sad to say that, but if we complain that politicians are selfish, upstarts, and careerists who find ways to divert money into their pockets, society is like that too. We have the politicians we do because the people recognise themselves in them, so the government is not doing enough, but the government is us. We could do better, but it starts with the literature and the mentorship, in the sense that the

⁶²⁸ See interview with Jean-Charles Lechasseur by Ryan Lux, February 7, 2020, 1:56:00 mins., original: « *ce qu'il va arriver, l'absurdité des choses, c'est que les gens ne veulent pas payer pour la cathédrale. C'était construit par les citoyens de Rimouski, mais en moment donné, quelqu'un va payer et ça serait mieux de ne payer pas l'avoir détruit, mais pour construire* ».

⁶²⁹ See interview with Pascal Gagnon by Ryan Lux, February 7, 2020, 24:00 mins., original: « *On a poussé beaucoup de responsabilités en matière du patrimoine en général dans les cours de la municipalité sans avoir donné les moyens financiers, des moyennes théoriques, les moyens de connaissances, pour gérer ces choses-là* ».

⁶³⁰ *Idem.*, 35:30 mins., original: « *si on fermait Marie-Reine-du-monde à Montréal, ça aurait un impact, mais notre cathédrale a le même prestige pour ici. Je pense que le gouvernement doit investir dans ces lieux de culte pour les protéger en cas de menace de fermeture. Parce qu'on n'est pas un grand centre, parce qu'on est loin d'un grand centre, donc il y a une espèce de désintérêt. Si on ne le voit pas, on l'ignore* ».

community could take it in hand themselves. Now, we are in the welfare mentality⁶³¹.

5. *A Standoff*

Who then should pay? That depends on whom you ask. The City pointed to the Diocese. The Diocese looked to secular society, understood as everyone but themselves. Civil society proposed more diverse and nuanced approaches; however, most suggested a mixed formula comprising the State, the Church and Civil Society in recognition that religious heritage represents a liability and asset for each sphere. Perhaps the most surprising theme expressed by civil society was the need to empower communities with the tools to take responsibility for churches themselves, as opposed to simply calling on government money alone because collective projects can reinvigorate a society. Having addressed how each constituency views ultimate responsibility for the cathedral, analysis will now turn briefly to how actors assess each other's pursuit of those aims.

Thus, the cathedral faced a daunting policy trifecta. The Church was no longer interested in supporting the costly infrastructure and pastoral compromises of maintaining a public religion, with its demands for majesty and compromise with dominant culture. The State conceives of religious practice as a fact of ethnic minorities, and civil society is challenged by a dysfunctional bureaucracy when it seeks to take responsibility for its churches via skewed criteria and multiple levels of qualifications. Now that we have addressed the religious and legal scopes of action, and the various positions of who is responsible for the cathedral, we will move on to mapping the conflict which took on a life of its own in Rimouski.

⁶³¹ *Idem.*, 1:06:00 mins., original: « Les gens ne mettent plus de l'argent dans les projets collectifs. Donc, il y a une désresponsabilisation sociale, puis le gouvernement, c'est le reflet de la société. C'est triste à dire comme ça, mais si on se plaint que les politiciens sont égoïstes, arrivistes, carriéristes, qui trouvent les façons de détourner l'argent dans leurs poches, la société est comme ça aussi. Les gens qu'on a élus, c'est parce que les gens se reconnaissent dedans, donc le gouvernement ne fait pas assez, mais le gouvernement c'est nous. On pourrait faire mieux, mais ça commence avec la littérature et l'accompagnement, dans le sens que la communauté pourrait le prendre en main eux-mêmes. Maintenant, on est dans la mentalité d'aide sociale ».

G. Assessment of Conflict

An iterative approach, undertaken since 2017, which involved longitudinal media analysis and ten days spent immersed in the height of the conflict has revealed an array of social actor types in this cathedral closure. Because of its status as a cathedral, out of any of the 650 closures I have studied, none have so fully expressed the potential range of social response and in such a relatively balanced proportion of spheres and closure perspectives. Six constituencies populate Rimouski's cathedral scandal: 1), Clergy and modernist Catholics, 2), Traditionalist Catholics, 3), Institutional civil society, and 4), Grassroots civil society 5), Strict secularist politicians, and 6), Open secularist politicians. These types are formed from each of the three domains: religion, civil society, and politics, and polarise over the issue of whether or not to desacralise the cathedral. Over the course of the scandal, groups on each side of the cathedral question discursively, politically, and legally encounter one another, often adversarially and always with mutual suspicion. The following section will examine how actors viewed their own strategies and how they were judged by others. Unfortunately, none of the churchwardens who supported their own parish at the expense of the cathedral, or modernist practising Catholics, agreed to participate, so I had to accept observation and media analysis as an inferior but accurate substitute.

1. Clergy

a) Self-assessment

Abbé Gérald Roy explained that at the beginning of the saga, at the outset of his collaboration with Louis Khalil and Co-op Paradis, his intentions were to

save the heritage building, while maintaining a space, a room large enough for occasional religious celebrations, perhaps New Year's Day, Saint-Jean-Baptiste, Easter, and Christmas. For other religious needs, we have several churches with

sufficient space. The project was for us priests and the Christian community, perhaps a way to establish contact with the wider culture. I liked that element⁶³².

Despite his enthusiasm for the project, Abbé Roy had reservations about how the project would be received by Rimouskois. Abbé Roy acknowledged that persuading residents of the propriety of moving the co-op into the cathedral was a difficult proposition owing to the kinds of subject matter they presented⁶³³. In retrospect, Abbé Roy admitted that “if I had to do it again, I would try to invest myself more to create links between the groups but I kind of let it go at one point; I felt powerless”⁶³⁴. Vicar General Abbé Lagacé agreed that where the Diocese failed was by allowing itself to get drawn into a belligerent role in the defence of its position as opposed to simply accepting that consensus would be impossible to achieve and proceeding with its plans in a more serene and accommodating manner⁶³⁵.

b) Assessment by a Traditionalist Catholic

Practising Catholic, churchwarden, and close associate of the Coalition, Jean-Charles Lechasseur viewed the Diocese’s actions and the strategy behind them as destructive. Long before a single church had closed, Lechasseur believed the Diocese’s objective was to walk away from the cathedral with as much money as they could squeeze out of it, without giving a second thought to communities or their heritage. He described what he called “the unwritten plan” as

⁶³² See interview with Abbé Gérald Roy by Ryan Lux, February 6, 2020, 15:00 mins., original: « *pour sauver l'édifice patrimonial, tout en conservant un espace, une salle assez considérable pour, à l'occasion, une célébration religieuse, peut-être le jour de l'an, la fête nationale, les Pâques, Noël. Pour les autres besoins religieux, nous avons plusieurs églises suffisantes. C'était pour nous, les prêtres et la communauté chrétienne, peut-être une façon d'établir le contact avec la culture. Moi, ça me plaisait, cet élément-là* ».

⁶³³ *Idem.*, 17:00 mins., original: « *ils étaient un peu en la marge des valeurs, contestataires un peu, des spectacles un peu osés. Ça a préparé ce qui s'en vient* ».

⁶³⁴ *Idem.*, 28:00 mins., original: « *si c'était à refaire, j'essayerai de m'investir davantage pour créer des liens entre les groupes et puis j'ai un peu laissé faire à moment donné, je me sentais impuissant* ».

⁶³⁵ See interview with Abbé Guy Lagacé by Ryan Lux, February 6, 2020, 14:00 mins., original: *Je comprends qu'il y a beaucoup d'émotion; il y a beaucoup d'agressivité qu'on ne puisse pas éviter, mais l'idée c'est de faire un consensus, puis de reconnaître qu'on ne pouvait pas la garder intacte. Il y aura fallu une reconnaissance que même un consensus serait difficile* ».

a machine that advances and destroys and is orchestrated and the only thing that was not foreseen is that they would create another parish. The unwritten plan was 100% executed. What we forget is that if they have this power, it's because the people have given the best of themselves⁶³⁶.

The dedicated parishioner felt deep betrayal by the Diocese, whose bishops he once personally served and suspected that the unwritten plan went further up the hierarchy. Lechasseur thought closing the cathedral might be only the first step in a longer process of the diocese being absorbed by the Diocese of Québec, which would inherit the tens of millions in foundations. He continued, observing that,

[w]hat the Church values, and what will be its downfall, is money. My faith, for my part, I make a distinction between a person's faith and beliefs and the actions of the Church. One might think of them as suffocating themselves, as if they are destroying themselves⁶³⁷.

It was only after the cathedral's closure that traditionalist Catholics realised an interest distinct from their modernist co-religionaries. Again, this type is less fully developed than the distinction between grassroots and institutional civil society because conceptually I initially classed them among cultural Catholics. Though it might seem trivial, the relationship to religious practice is determinant. Moreover, the distinction is conceptually important because it confirms the role of polarisation across the three spheres over the conservation or transformation of the cathedral.

c) *Assessment by an Open Secularist Politician*

Former mayor Éric Forest perceived the clergy's strategy in much the same way as Jean-Charles Lechasseur, as a unilaterally imposed *fait accompli*. He described the Diocese as an ideological

⁶³⁶ See interview with Jean-Charles Le Chasseur by Ryan Lux, February 7, 2020, 2:08:00 mins., original: « *C'est une machine qui avance et qui détruit et qui est orchestré et la seule chose qui n'était pas prévue, c'est qu'il créerait une autre paroisse. Le plan non-écrit a été exécuté à 100%. Ce qu'on oublie, c'est que s'ils ont ce pouvoir-là, c'est parce que les gens ont leur donné le meilleur d'eux-mêmes* ».

⁶³⁷ *Idem.*, 2:05:00 mins., original: « *La valeur de l'Église, et ce qui sera sa perte, c'est l'argent. Ma foi, pour ma part, je fais une distinction entre la personne et sa croyance et l'agir de l'Église. On pourrait penser comme s'ils sont en train de s'asphyxier; ils sont en train de se détruire* ».

dictatorship where some people have decided that the cathedral will close, not taking into account the history, not taking into account the links with the population and the cathedral as such.

They decided to follow a purely fiscal and business approach. They impose themselves on the community and then they wash their hands of it. Then our \$30 million they put aside to ensure their retirements for the elderly priests. I think this is an uncompromising approach, devoid of any sense of community and culture⁶³⁸.

d) Assessment by a Strict Secularist Politician

Mayor in 2020, Marc Parent believed the Diocese planned for years to quietly allow the cathedral to deteriorate, beginning with treasurer Michel Lavoie excluding the church from State subsidies to the point of being condemned as a threat to coerce City funding⁶³⁹.

e) Assessment by Grassroots Civil and Institutional Society

Writer Gilles Le Chasseur maintained that, in the beginning, he gave the Diocese the benefit of the doubt that its intentions were good, but his credulity did not last long. His first indication that something was amiss was the gusto with which the Diocese went about securing the cathedral immediately after its closure, which Le Chasseur found bizarre: “[t]he netting they put on the cathedral was staged. It dramatises the situation; it makes people feel worried. In the last five years,

⁶³⁸ See interview with Éric Forest by Ryan Lux, February 25, 2020, 15:00 mins., original: « *une dictature idéologique où certaines personnes ont décidé que la cathédrale va fermer, ne tenant pas compte de l'historique, ne tenant pas compte des liens avec la population et la cathédrale comme telle. Ils ont décidé de suivre une approche uniquement comptable, et affaires, et ils s'imposent à la communauté, ils se lavent les mains. Puis notre \$30 millions, ils se mettent de côté, ça va s'assurer leurs vieux jours pour les anciens prêtres. Moi, je pense que c'est une approche dépourvue de tout sens communautaire et culturelle, et l'objet d'aucun compromis* ».

⁶³⁹ See interview with Marc Parent by Ryan Lux, February 4, 2020, 10:00 mins., original: « *La création d'une coquille vide, une paroisse sans paroissiens, donc c'était toute une stratégie. C'est certain que le sentiment que moi j'ai eu à titre de maire de Rimouski, c'était que vraiment les religieux au sein de l'archevêché qui disaient bien, ce n'est pas grave si la cathédrale tombe en ruine. Bon, la Ville va en prendre possession. Moi, j'ai dit, il n'y a pas question que les citoyens de la Ville de Rimouski paient une deuxième fois pour la cathédrale. Il y avait certains à l'intérieur de l'archevêché qui étaient de l'opinion que la Ville va s'en occuper, puis nous, on a vraiment voulu les tenir loin de ça* ».

no stone has fallen”⁶⁴⁰. Others, like Kurt Vignola, Pascal Gagnon, and Jacques Landry, also expressed scepticism about how dangerous the cathedral really was. But what Le Chasseur could not understand was why other clergy and religious orders did not intervene to help save the cathedral. He said he found

it very symptomatic of the *omerta*, that there was not a priest or a nun who was favourable to restoring the cathedral. It is distressing but one does not bite the hands that feed them. They do not speak out because somewhere there is a law of silence. It is the hypothesis of *omerta*⁶⁴¹.

f) General Assessment

Thus, the perception of the clergy’s strategy was uniformly one of premeditated conspiracy to absolve itself of responsibility for the cathedral, varying only in degrees of perceived avarice. Institutional civil society actors, on one hand, suspected the opportunistic exaggeration of the cathedral’s danger to precipitate its closure, while, on the other hand, practising Catholic Lechasseur suspected a long-term strategy to fuse the Diocese of Rimouski with that of Quebec and carry away local treasure in so doing. As for the clergy’s perception of their own actions, they saw them as inevitable.

2. *Grassroots Civil Society*

a) Self-assessment

Leader of Committee Cathedral 2016’s, later the Diocesan Committee to Save the Cathedral, Jacques Landry, explained their *modus operandi* was initially to attract media attention to his group’s efforts to prevent the cathedral’s desacralisation and transformation. Behind the scenes,

⁶⁴⁰ See interview with Gilles Le Chasseur by Ryan Lux, February 3, 2020, 5:00 mins., original: « *Les filets qu'ils ont mis sur la cathédrale, c'est de la mise en scène. Ça dramatise la situation, ça nourrit chez les gens le sentiment d'inquiétude. Depuis les cinq ans, il n'y aucune autre pierre qui est tombée* ».

⁶⁴¹ *Idem.*, 33:00 mins., original: « *très symptomatique de l'omerta, qu'il n'y avait pas un prêtre ou une religieuse qui soit préférable à la sauvegarde de la cathédrale, ça détresse lentement, on ne mord pas les mains qui nous nourrissent. Ils ne parlent pas ces gens. C'est parce que quelque part, il y a une loi du silence. C'est l'hypothèse de l'omerta* ».

he used personal networking to collaborate with and gain support from local businesses, politicians and elites to elect a majority of parish councillors favourable to the cathedral. From his own perspective, his group's movement was driven by

a population expressing its need for identification, towards a mediatisation of a collective goal. Of course, when there is national attention, people don't like it, but the result of the media coverage ... maybe it will unblock the situation”⁶⁴².

He recognised, however, that waging his campaign in the media was not the way that bishops are accustomed to negotiating but nevertheless believed that backroom deals were not the way to manage a collective good⁶⁴³.

b) *Assessment by Clergy*

Abbé Gérald Roy explained, Landry and his group were too late to participate because the Parish Council, with Normand Lavoie as its president, was single-mindedly determined to rid itself of the cathedral as a panacea and had already spent two years on its plan to do so. He admitted that “the Parish Council was a bit aggressive with this committee because [the challenge] came as a shock”⁶⁴⁴. Sitting down with the new committee did not help, Abbé Roy recalled that he himself,

was hurt and angry with that group. Because I was part of the whole evolution of this project. Now we have a first meeting with them, and it did not go well. They met with the archbishop, and it did not go very well either. Then finally we

⁶⁴² See interview with Jacques Landry by Ryan Lux, February 7, 2020, 21:00 mins., original: « *une population qui s'exprime vers un besoin d'identification, vers une médiatisation d'un but collectif. C'est sûr, quand il y a une visée nationale, les gens n'aiment pas ça. Puis je dirais aussi que le résultat de la médiatisation qu'on aura ... peut-être ça va faire un déblocage* ».

⁶⁴³ *Idem.*, 37:00 mins., original: « *Je pense qu'il y avait un affrontement qui n'était pas souhaité, mais il y avait un affrontement entre une position qui était la leur et la nôtre, qui était quand même assez importante. Peut-être qu'il y aurait eu d'autres moyens, peut-être on aurait eu à s'immiscer de l'intérieur de 1862 avec le premier mandat qu'avait Louis Khalil. Peut-être le maire aurait pu travailler de l'intérieur et a amené des solutions?* ».

⁶⁴⁴ See interview with Gérald Roy, *Op. Cit.*, 21:00 mins., original: « *le conseil de fabrique fut un peu agressif avec ce comité-là, parce que c'était un choc* ».

said perhaps that we should try to speak and find a solution and I was ready for that, but the Parish Council was not⁶⁴⁵.

Abbé Roy explained there was very little room to manoeuvre to bridge the gap between the two groups because Parish finances being what they were, the conflict was zero-sum, and the Parish Council was simply not willing to close all of its churches, where most of its parishioners practised and donated from. Abbé Guy Lagacé tried to view the conflict with the grassroots as a socio-religious and historical process that was essentially unavoidable, inevitably painful, and hopefully cathartic.

There is too much opposition. There are people who want to keep the cathedral, who have no interest in the religious dimension but still want to keep it intact. I think that what we are experiencing right now is normal. I see that people are beginning to nuance their views. Maybe that's a way to lance a boil. It allows us to see where we stand; it also allows us to discover our limits that now are not like before and that we have to make do with it⁶⁴⁶.

But even if the Vicar General saw potential for future benefits from the kind of frank discourse that Landry and his coalition provoked, he nevertheless judged the entry of the group on the scene as having stalled progress on the cathedral.

They propose easy responses. In the current context, the answers are not easy. It will take time to really understand this saga; it allows people to speak, it allows people to say what they think, but it becomes aggressive on both sides. It forces people to speak, but at the same time, when there are too many voices, silence is the order of the day⁶⁴⁷.

⁶⁴⁵ *Idem.*, 23:00 mins., original: « J'avais de la peine et j'étais en colère contre ce groupe-là. Parce que je me faisais partie de toute l'évolution de ce projet. Là, on a une première rencontre avec eux et ce n'a pas très bien été. Ils ont rencontré l'archevêque et ça n'allait pas très bien non plus, puis finalement, on s'est dit que peut-être il faudrait essayer de parler, puis de trouver une solution. Moi, j'étais prêt à ça, mais le conseil de fabrique ne l'était pas ».

⁶⁴⁶ See interview with Abbé Guy Lagacé, *Op. Cit.*, 15:00 mins., original: « Il y a trop d'opposition. Il y a des gens qui veulent la garder, qui n'ont aucun intérêt dans la dimension religieuse, mais veulent la garder quand même intacte. Je pense que ce qu'on vit en ce moment, c'est normal. Je vois qu'on commence à nuancer les propos. Peut-être que ça permet de crever un abcès. Ça permet de nous voir où on se situe, ça nous permet aussi de découvrir aussi nos limites, que maintenant ce n'est plus comme avant, puis qu'il faut faire avec ça ».

⁶⁴⁷ *Idem.*, 16:00 mins., original: « Il y a des réponses trop faciles. Dans le contexte actuel, les réponses ne sont pas faciles. Ça va prendre du temps pour comprendre réellement cette saga, ça permet pour les gens de prendre la parole, ça permet que les gens puissent dire, ce qu'ils pensent, mais ça devient agressif des deux côtés. Ça force la parole, mais en même temps, quand il y a trop de paroles, le silence est de mise ».

Clearly then, clergy understood Landry's position against desacralisation; they just did not consider it to be legitimate and experienced it as a nuisance because it lacked any official status other than having the charitable status of any *ad hoc* group.

c) *Assessment by a Traditionalist Catholic*

The opposite was true for Jean-Charles Lechasseur, who saw the combat as existential in nature. Lechasseur, along with the other four renegade churchwardens, were key allies for Landry's grassroots movement and relied heavily on his support in their religiously motivated campaign to retain the cathedral's religious vocation and status.

d) *Assessment by Institutional Civil Society*

What then of the moderates Pascal Gagnon and Kurt Vignola? Gagnon, it should be recalled, participated in the Co-op Paradis project in his capacity as president of the local heritage society. Despite the project's failure at the hands of Committee 2016, Gagnon believed members of the group had good intentions.

But at a certain point, look, it got completely out of hand. That's clear, and I would say that it's really sad because, currently, it's the building that suffers; it's the population that suffers, that is divided, and we risk losing a monument that is important not only for Rimouski, but for the whole of Quebec⁶⁴⁸.

Nevertheless, Gagnon was still hopeful that reanimating the cathedral was still possible, despite the entrenched positions of Landry and the clergy.

Vignola believed that neither the Diocese nor Landry's coalition were pursuing realistic objectives.

He claimed that while the Coalition argued that

⁶⁴⁸ See interview with Pascal Gagnon by Ryan Lux, February 7, 2020, 14:45 mins., original: « *mais dans un certain moment donné, écoutez, ç'a complètement dérapé. Ça, c'est clair, puis je dirais que c'est vraiment triste parce qu'actuellement, c'est le bâtiment qui en souffre; c'est la population qui en souffre, qui se divise, puis on risque de perdre un monument qui est important non seulement pour Rimouski, mais pour l'ensemble du Québec* ».

they have money, they have partners, but they have never put a dollar on the table. The Coalition is a lot of hype, saying they have partners. They have looked from one end of the county all the way to Rivière-du-Loup. They hired a lawyer to sue the Diocese; these people are minimising the cost of the work⁶⁴⁹.

Almost four years into the combat, when we spoke, Vignola likened the members of the Coalition to

tired prodigal sons. It takes humility, I think they are ready for a compromise. They will never see the cathedral restored. It is finished, but the preservation of the choir is possible. A consultation, a press conference where everyone could save face and there will be no more conflict in Rimouski⁶⁵⁰.

e) *Assessment by Strict and Open Secularist Politicians*

Politicians remained relatively silent with respect to Landry's group, although it should be noted that open secularist politicians, MNA Harold Label and former MP Suzanne Tremblay, collaborated with Landry's Diocesan Coalition to Save the Cathedral. Both mayors, Forest and Parent were more ambivalent, blaming Landry and his group for the failure of Louis Khalil's *Projet Paradis* and for exacerbating local divisions. Forest identified the beginning of the conflict with Landry's campaign, which he qualified as "clumsy"⁶⁵¹.

f) *General Assessment*

It was clear then that Landry and his organisation were deeply polarising. While his populist style appealed to those who felt alienated by the Diocese, such as non-practising identitary Catholics and Traditionist Catholics, such as the renegade churchwardens, his aggressive tactics and irreverence

⁶⁴⁹ See interview with Kurt Vignola by Ryan Lux, February 4, 2020, 21:00 mins., original: « *Le regroupement dit qu'ils ont de l'argent, mais les partenaires n'ont jamais mis un dollar sur la table. Le regroupement, c'est beaucoup de battage en disant qu'ils ont des partenaires. Ils ont cherché au bout de la MRC jusqu'à Rivière-du-Loup. Ils ont embauché un avocat pour poursuivre l'archevêché; ces gens-là minimisent les coûts de travaux* ».

⁶⁵⁰ *Idem.*, 30:00 mins., original: « *Ils sont fatigués, fils prodigue, il prend l'humilité, ce que j'en pense, qu'ils soient prêts à un compromis. Ils ne verront jamais la cathédrale restaurée. C'est terminé, mais la préservation du chœur, c'est possible. Une consultation, une conférence de presse où tout le monde pourrait se sauver face et il n'y aura plus de conflits à Rimouski* ».

⁶⁵¹ See interview with Éric Forest, *Op. Cit.*, 18:00 mins., original: « *mal habile* ».

for traditionalist forms of authority and norms made him a *persona non grata* with the Church hierarchy and institutional civil society organisations who did not take him seriously. As for politicians, his doggedness was variously seen as an asset when holding the Diocese to account or a thorn in their side when he demanded action from the municipality using public safety and heritage legislation as grounds for intervention.

3. *Institutional Civil Society.*

a) *Self-assessment*

If there was any moderation to be found within Rimouski's cathedral scandal, it was with institutional civil society, such as the heritage society, the historical milieu, and the 2017 consultation process. Kurt Vignola and Pascal Gagnon, both historians and teachers at the local Cégep, participated in various capacities. In describing their strategies, both men saw their role as twofold. First to inform the public about the cathedral and its history, and second to facilitate consultation so the community could arrive at a project which could save the building⁶⁵².

Vignola explained that while he would have preferred the cathedral to retain its original religious vocation, what differentiated him from the people in the Coalition or the renegade churchwardens was that

if reality says it's financially impossible, I'm able to give up on a dream by asking, what can be done practically? The first thing that is at stake is our honour

⁶⁵² See interview with Pascal Gagnon, *Op. Cit.*, 23:00 mins., original: « *l'idée c'est de trouver une nouvelle vocation pour ces bâtiments, de pouvoir les récupérer, de pouvoir les réanimer surtout, pour en faire un endroit où l'ensemble de la population peut se rendre, que ça soit pour le culte en partie, que ça soit pour complètement d'autres choses. L'idée c'est de redonner accès à ce bâtiment pour qu'il puisse avoir une nouvelle vie* ».

and integrity as a community. The demolition of the cathedral would be a failure”⁶⁵³.

Reflecting on the abandonment of the initial *Projet Paradis*, Vignola believed what was missing was open and public civil society participation, noting that with matters involving the collectivity “The argument of authority and finance does not work”⁶⁵⁴.

b) *Assessment by Grassroots Civil Society*

Though institutional civil society did not attract much criticism, it was not immune. Essayist Gilles Le Chasseur was critical of both the heritage society, of which Gagnon was president, and the consultation process, led by Vignola. With respect to the heritage society, Le Chasseur criticised their lack of transparency and cosy relationship with the Diocese⁶⁵⁵. Not one to mince words, Le Chasseur likewise took aim at Vignola’s opinion poll and consultation process. Le Chasseur was not impressed by the limited sample size of 400 people living only within Rimouski’s city limits. He wrote that when “you want to know the depth of the sea, you don’t probe the bed of a stream. It would have been more courageous to carry out a consultation across the diocese, home to 148,000 Catholics”⁶⁵⁶. Moreover, Le Chasseur doubted the sincerity of the consultation process, noting that the Diocese announced its decision to desacralise the cathedral only one week after

⁶⁵³ See interview with Kurt Vignola, *Op. Cit.*, 37:30 mins., original: « si la réalité dit qu’il est financier impossible, je suis capable d’abandonner un rêve pour dire, c’est quoi sur le côté pratique qu’on puisse faire. La première chose qui est en jeu, c’est notre honneur et intégrité comme collectivité. La cathédrale démolie serait un échec ».

⁶⁵⁴ *Idem.*, 47:30 mins., original: « l’argument de l’autorité et de la finance ne fonctionne pas ».

⁶⁵⁵ See Gilles Le Chasseur, « Jésus a chassé les vendeurs du Temple, Mgr. Grondin veut chasser Dieu de la Cathédrale! », *L’Avantage Votre journal*, December 13, 2017, (web), consulted April 8, 2021, <https://www.lavantage.qc.ca/article/2017/12/13/jesus-a-chasse-les-vendeurs-du-temple--mgr-grondin-veut-chasser->, original : « Ladite société, qui ne compte que cinquante membres, aurait avantage à les consulter avant de se prononcer sur notre patrimoine. Encore là, tout semble se passer en vase clos. Ça peut donner l’impression de faire autorité et sérieux quand on dit que cette société a participé au huis clos de l’évêque. D’un vase clos à un huis clos, la transparence ne peut s’imposer ».

⁶⁵⁶ See Gilles Le Chasseur, « Rimouski : désacralisée ou la cerise sur le gâteau », *Le Soleil*, July 5, 2017, (web), consulted April 8, 2020, <https://www.lesoleil.com/opinions/point-de-vue/rimouski-desacralisee-ou-la-cerise-sur-le-gateau-c9e85d8ac60f16e07286ed1485f9e245>, original : « Quand on veut connaître la profondeur de la mer, on ne sonde pas le lit d’un ruisseau. Il aurait été plus courageux de faire une consultation à travers le diocèse, comptant 148 000 catholiques, puisque tous les diocésains ont contribué à l’érection de la cathédrale, à son paiement et à son entretien au fil des décennies ».

briefs were presented, and argued that, in the interest of objectivity, a public committee should have analysed the results.

c) Assessment by Clergy & Politicians,

Meanwhile the Diocese, who commissioned Vignola to lead consultations and considered naming Gagnon president of the renegade parish council⁶⁵⁷, preferred dealing with institutional civil society actors than their grassroots counterparts, as did municipal politicians. For this reason, partisans of the cathedral's primarily religious vocation, who filled the ranks of grassroots and traditionalist Catholics, viewed them with suspicion as collaborators. Grassroots civil society actors are similarly ambivalent towards local politicians, whom they feel do not take them seriously.

4. Politicians

a) Self-assessment

Both Éric Forest and Marc Parent viewed their roles more as facilitators than as direct participants. Mayor Forest worked closely with Mgr. Fournier before his death and tried to indirectly support the cathedral renovations by offering to purchase the rectory, the parking lot and Saint-Pie-X, which treasurer Michel Lavoie eventually refused just after Mgr. Fournier's death. It was at that moment when Forest recalled City-Church collaboration beginning to deteriorate. "Once there were avenues where we could work together, but now it's clear that there are too many quarrels"⁶⁵⁸. Parent likewise tried to facilitate by meeting with the archbishop to explain project management, intervening when the cathedral's heating and sprinkler systems broke and agreeing to contribute

⁶⁵⁷ See Pierre Michaud, « Pascal Gagnon est loin d'être découragé », *Journal le Soir*, April 27, 2020, (web), consulted August 15, 2020, <https://journallesoir.ca/2020/04/27/pascal-gagnon-est-loin-detre-decourage/>

⁶⁵⁸ See interview with Éric Forest, *Op. Cit.* 13 :30 mins., original: « *Il y avait des avenues où on pouvait collaborer, mais maintenant, c'est clair qu'il y a tellement de chicanes* ».

to restoring the cathedral's exterior, but eventually became frustrated with the Diocese's indecision. He saw his main role as pressuring the Diocese to create a reserve fund that would cover the costs of demolition estimated in the millions of dollars.

b) Assessment by Institutional Civil Society

Institutional civil society's perspective of the city's strategy and actions has already been largely discussed above in the section devoted to secularism, but to reiterate, both Gagnon and Vignola perceived the City, under Parent's strict secularist leadership, as hiding behind Bill 21 in order to justify municipal inaction.

c) Assessment by Grassroots Civil Society

Grassroots civil society, for its part, accused local politicians of not taking them seriously. Landry complained that

to justify their position [the Diocese] will say that it will cost too much to return it to a good state. There are all sorts of ways of saying that our group is making believe, despite the fact that we have taken all the necessary steps to clearly lay out our proposal. They are either not up to date, or they don't want to know. They are tired of hearing us talk. Politically it's not expedient; it's for this reason that they say we are making it up. They want to cultivate misinformation; there's a lot of it out there. Although the mayor has certain obligations towards heritage, he has washed his hands of the cathedral⁶⁵⁹.

Gilles Le Chasseur perceived specifically Marc Parent as a cynic, having promised to make the cathedral his number one priority during the 2017 municipal election and having spent his term since then eschewing responsibility for it.

⁶⁵⁹ See interview with Jacques Landry, *Op. Cit.*, 28:00 mins., original: « pour justifier leur position, ils vont dire que ça va coûter trop cher pour remettre [la cathédrale] dans un bon état. Il y a toutes sortes de façon de dire que notre groupe fabule, malgré qu'on ait fait toutes les actions requises pour confirmer notre position. Ils ne sont pas concurrents ou ils ne veulent pas savoir, ils sont tannés de nous entendre parler, politiquement, ce n'est pas vendable. C'est tout cet aspect-là qui fait qu'ils vont dire qu'on fabule. Ils veulent cultiver les désinformations, donc c'est sûr qu'on a beaucoup d'informations qui sont véhiculées par certaines. Bien que le maire à certaines obligations envers le patrimoine, il s'en est lavé ses mains ».

d) *Assessment by Traditionalist Catholics*

Renegade churchwarden Jean-Charles Lechasseur resented that City politicians negotiated directly with the Diocese rather than his Parish Council on cathedral matters, which he noted, was the legal proprietor of the cathedral and its lands⁶⁶⁰. So, like Landry, Lechasseur and the renegade churchwardens resented being overlooked by local politicians.

5. *Social Cartography of a Church Closure*

Six distinct groups come into view: 1), clergy, dominated by the Diocese and who largely support the Grand Parish Council's determination – Modernist Catholics - to retain Rimouski's four remaining churches by disencumbering itself of the cathedral; 2), Traditionalist Catholics, i.e. the renegade churchwardens, appear on the other end of the spectrum from clergy, whose mission was to keep Saint-Germain's primary religious vocation at the expense of newer churches; 3), institutional civil society, which worked within the ecclesiastical, bureaucratic and political systems and whose main priority was reanimating the cathedral as a heritage building; 4), Grassroots civil society, led by Jacques Landry's Diocesan Coalition to Save the Cathedral, applied a populist approach and Gilles Le Chasseur who influenced popular opinion, both came to the defence of the cathedral on behalf of the community as a critical collective resource; 5), Strict secularists who do not believe in State responsibility for religious institutions and; 6), Open secularist politicians whose main role is to act as liaisons between the clergy and other levels of government, and to apply pressure on the institution to assume its financial and social

⁶⁶⁰ See interview with Jean-Charles Le Chasseur, *Op. Cit.*, 1:36:00 mins., original : « Ils ont oublié que nous existons et quand ils connaissent la réalité de notre fabrique, non fonctionnelle non opérationnelle et actuellement intransigeante avec l'Archevêché, la Ville les rencontre pour leur offrir des cadeaux; les cadeaux sont quoi ? C'est quand le maire dit à l'archevêque qu'ils ont payé leur part de l'entente, il a consenti. La Ville a consenti par la main gauche ce que donne la main droite. Je vais vous payer 2 millions \$ pour le presbytère, puis le terrain, donnant, donnant. En réalité on perd notre presbytère, notre terrain, et là, ce qui se passe à partir de là, on se fait toujours déposséder, mais encore une fois parce qu'ils savent que nous n'avons pas la capacité de combattre ».

responsibilities. The two types differed mainly on the degree to which they would participate in the dossier.

Neither the institutional civil society, nor the politicians involved in this case, are remarkable. These types participate in most closures in much the same manner. Instead, what distinguished Rimouski's case from other experiences of church closures was 1), the Diocese's authoritarian zeal, 2), grassroots civil society's dogged populism, which enjoyed widespread popularity among Rimouskois in their 50s and older, who did not practise their Catholicism assiduously but for whom religion remained a foundational component of their identity, and 3), the lengths to which certain traditionalist Catholics were willing to practise insubordination of the institutional hierarchy in defence of their liturgical convictions.

Supporters of the Diocese tended to be practising Catholics for whom church communities were more sacred and social than symbolic. Put otherwise, the question of the cathedral has uncorked polarising forces which pull Rimouskois away from a centre characterised by ambient cultural Catholicism and towards either the pole of modernist Catholics who see religion as something earned and for who Parish Councils were the centre of governance, or the pole of populist or traditional identitary Catholics for whom the immutable and inherited aspects of tradition were more important than institutional authority, which they were naturally inclined to defend.

H. Conclusion

This chapter has been dedicated to systematically analysing interviews with nine principal social actors who represent a wide spectrum of the many Rimouskois embroiled in the scandal, which continued for another four years after I visited the Lower St. Lawrence capital in 2020. I started by establishing largely shared views regarding the importance of Catholicism for

Rimouski's identity with respect to history, memory, and a half-century of cultural change. Next, discussion proceeded to present participants' views on individual leaders' impact on the conflict's development. After that I addressed institutional and legal structures which frame how Quebec's Catholic churches operate (and close) and direct actors' horizon of action. The following section was devoted to the political question of who should pay for the cathedral. Finally, I mapped out the relationality of the social groupings that crystallised out of the cathedral's closure and suggested a polarising dynamic characterised by an elite – populist dichotomy, in terms of people's relationship to religion as a concept, as a practice, and as a physical space, notably the Cathedral Saint-Germain of Rimouski.

1. Discussion: Interview Subjects as Personalities or Figures

Many close to the conflict, including mayor Éric Forest, suggested that Rimouski's conflict was rooted in an unlucky combination of specific personality conflicts as opposed to wider social forces. He said that,

where there are human beings, and human nature being what it is, people will be flawed. So, it is more the attitude of certain people in this instance that created the division because, at the beginning of the case, at the time of Mgr. Fournier, there was a clear will to respect our competencies and reality”⁶⁶¹.

While the senator was undoubtedly correct that the conflict's dynamics were contingent on the people and personalities involved, one wonders if a different cast of characters faced with the exact same dilemmas would follow similar orientations. Take for instance Mgr. Grondin, a young bishop, was not ordained as a priest until 1989, as opposed to Mgr. Fournier, who was ordained in

⁶⁶¹ See interview with Éric Forest by Ryan Lux, February 25, 2020, 21:00 mins., original: « où il y a d'homme, il y a de l'hommerie, donc c'est plutôt l'attitude de certaines personnes dans ce dossier-là qui ont créé la division parce qu'au début du dossier, à l'époque de Mgr. Fournier, il y avait une volonté claire dans le respect de chacun de notre compétence et de la réalité ».

1967, or Marc Parent, born in 1961 as opposed to Forest's date of birth in 1952. Could the fact that Mgr. Fournier and Mayor Forest worked well together and shared a certain vision of the Church-State collaboration be attributed to generational differences? Specifically, could their religious socialisation before the Quiet Revolution be a factor, for instance? Was it not inevitable that a younger bishop, less concerned with Catholicism's public role, would one day have as a mayoral counterpart someone who likewise considered religion as a private matter and thus outside of his purview? Would not some other cultural Catholics of a certain age have been outraged in Jacques Landry's place? Is it hard to imagine other history teachers not wanting to draw on their training and status to bridge the generational gap to preserve at least a relic of an important past for their students? If Gilles Le Chasseur did not put pen to paper, might have someone else's frustration not spilled onto the page? It is certain that were Abbé Roy and Abbé Lagacé placed elsewhere, financial contributions and religious practice would have inevitably forced the question of how the Parish should move forward.

As such, I suggest that Rimouski's cathedral crisis represents a distillation of the cultural, socio-religious, and ecclesiastical pressures faced by Quebec's Catholic Church in general. Conducting the interviews *in situ* afforded the important insight that while personalities were important, for each person I spoke with, there were at least ten others like them with whom I could have spoken with, and in many cases did. Regrettably, for lack of space, I could not directly include the voices of five in-depth interviews and another ten from a group interview, although they provided invaluable insights. As an outsider, I perceived actors according to their roles and not primarily by personality, as locals might be tempted to do. This approach allowed me to test my hypothesis that certain figures tend to emerge during church closures, representing the various estates of Church, State, Civil Society, and the public at large. Furthermore, spending a week in Rimouski and at least

an hour, often more, with each subject sheds light on the invisible social ties, whether of affinity or antipathy, that link figures and which do not form part of the public record used as the material for the first chapter. Because of this gossip, innuendo, and background, I was able to contextually observe how groups formed and interacted.

2. *Polarisation: The Question of Sacrality*

One of the most striking results of this case was the question of polarisation. Of course, I realised there were two poles, in the sense that some people wanted to keep the cathedral as the seat of the Archdiocese and others did not. I naively expected each of the three social domains to confront one another as a bloc pursuing shared interests, so it was a surprise to me when distinct groups appeared within each sphere and whose aims were the inverse of their counterparts. Initially, I did not see the distinction between two types of practising Catholics as well as politicians. That is because at first, I amalgamated Catholics, like the renegade churchwardens, with the grassroots civil society members of the Coalition. It took some time for me to appreciate that, though their objectives and tactics overlapped, their engagement came from a primarily religious place, whereas the Cultural Catholics were motivated more by identity. For the politicians, I did not meet with Senator Éric Forest until more than a month later so I did not appreciate the divergence between his approach to religion and that of Marc Parent's⁶⁶². This discovery tidied up my typology, which had been disequibrated by my field work. For example, I understood civil society to be on the side of the cathedral, so I had placed Jean-Charles Lechasseur in that camp, but then how could I discuss the religious sphere as supporting closure while accounting for his clear religious motivations? How could I dismiss politicians as generally indifferent when Éric Forest

⁶⁶² Nor had I interacted with other levels of government for that matter.

had worked so closely with the Archdiocese to save the cathedral? I had perceived the difference from the outset between grassroots and institutional civil society, based on their frosty references to one another, it took time to appreciate the same dynamic in religion and politics.

Under this light, it is clear the polarisation is a key motor of Rimouski's cathedral crisis and discursively produced six distinct logics of why to restore or transform the cathedral. Each group's positions were completely rationale, based on their view of what constituted religious heritage.

The fused Parish Council, dominated by churchwardens representing parish churches; clergy and the Diocese (modernist Catholics), in desperate need to reduce their expenses and adjust to contemporary religious realities, acted out of their concern for the future of the Church as a living, believing, and practising community. Abbé Gérald Roy explained that “[f]or me, the great religious heritage to be preserved is the Christian faith; the faith of our fathers and adapt it to today's life. This is the heritage that must be preserved first and foremost”⁶⁶³.

Traditionalist Catholics could not accept their counterparts' position. Their religious experience was fundamentally too invested in the history of the institution, a reverence for place, aesthetic inspiration and ancient liturgy, to be satisfied by newer churches. For them it was impossible to save the faith community as heritage by transplanting it for reasons of financial or political expediency. Jean-Charles Lechasseur adamantly maintained that the desacralisation of the cathedral would be experienced as a death for Catholics like himself. He explained that

there's something alive in the cathedral that attracts people ... When they say we're going to preserve the church as a building, it would be an empty shell ... Tomorrow morning we can do a good job here. We can put glass and anything

⁶⁶³ See interview with Abbé Gérald Roy by Ryan Lux, February 6, 2020, 40:15 mins., original: « *Pour moi, le grand patrimoine religieux à conserver, c'est la foi chrétienne; la foi de nos pères et l'adapter à la vie d'aujourd'hui. C'est ça qu'il faut d'abord conserver comme patrimoine* ».

else. It could be beautiful, but people who have not experienced what the cathedral was will never have the idea of what could have remained⁶⁶⁴.

A significant majority of the adult public, nearly all of whom are cultural Catholics, were more concerned about how closing the cathedral would affect their cultural identification, their sense of place, and connection with history, an important part of which was informed by religious heritage, especially its pre-Vatican II and Quiet Revolution variant. Grassroots civil society's resistance to the cathedral's closure came from a spirit of ambivalence towards religion. On the one hand, given the comments cited throughout this chapter, they kept a distance from contemporary orthodoxy and religious authority. On the other hand, they retained a potent sense of nostalgia for a bygone era that continued to inform their identity and connected them to past generations. Old churches like the cathedral, even if they function vicariously as Grace Davie would suggest, are the last tangible vestiges and link to that other world and that connection is part of their utility in times of need. As Gilles Le Chasseur told me, Rimouskois had a moral duty to stand up to the clergy because "culturally, religious heritage is irreplaceable"⁶⁶⁵. Fernand Dumont would describe this phenomenon as churches acting as *la référence*. The quest to save them, even by critical Catholics (cultural and traditionalists), can be seen as a defence of transcendence. As sources of collective symbolic identification old churches, as reservoirs of tradition were seen as conduits to "provide memory and hope for a creative entry into the future"⁶⁶⁶. Today, these critical Catholics challenge

⁶⁶⁴ See interview with Jean-Charles Lechasseur by Ryan Lux, February 7, 2020, 1:47:00 mins., original: « *Il y a quelque chose de vivant dans la cathédrale qui attire les gens ... Quand ils disent qu'on va préserver l'église comme édifice ça serait une coquille vide ... Demain matin on peut faire un bon job ici on peut mettre du verre et n'importe quoi, ça pourrait être bien beau, mais les gens qui n'ont pas connu ce qui c'était n'auront jamais l'idée de ce qu'elle peut rester ... En plus la cathédrale offre beaucoup plus que des statues, c'est une place de vie avant tout* ».

⁶⁶⁵ See interview with Gilles Le Chasseur by Ryan Lux, February 3, 2020, 1:00:00, original: « *culturellement le patrimoine religieux est irremplaçable* ».

⁶⁶⁶ See Gregory Baum, *Fernand Dumont: A Sociologist Turns to the Future*, McGill-Queen's University Press, p. 61.

faith as obedience as creative agents for renewal in much the same way as liberal Catholics questioned conformism leading up to Vatican II.

Institutional Civil Society, on the other hand, has an interest in expertise, classification, and interpretation, which any transformation would entail and offers that sector exciting new opportunities to illuminate religious heritage. It is important to underline that I do not see institutional civil society as greedy to expand their turf, but rather as a sector rising to an immense challenge to provide access to religious culture to a new generation, which otherwise would lack an important capacity to symbolically identify with the French-Canadian past.

Open secularist politicians like Forest understood this. In response to the argument that churches are only bricks and mortar and that a sincere belief in the gospel does not require them, Forest was unsympathetic. To explain himself, he used a mayoral analogy. He said that to suggest religion did not need churches is to abstract from the existing reality where people are attached to the cathedral. It is to be insensitive. It's like if you're the mayor of a city where, for example, public transport is important to people, but you say, "I don't care about that at all"; you're ignoring your mandate. You're there to make decisions in the interest of the majority and if that mayor says no, this is not our problem. But, if that's the case, why does everywhere else keep their churches?⁶⁶⁷ Here Forest revealed his expectation of a bishop, which was to govern on behalf of all Catholics, not just the 1,000 who attended Mass each week in Rimouski, but of the other 148,000 across the archdiocese

⁶⁶⁷ *Idem.*, 36:30 mins., original: « c'est de faire l'abstraction d'une réalité qui existe où les gens sont attachés à la cathédrale. C'est de faire preuve d'une non-sensibilité. C'est comme si tu es maire d'une ville où, pour les gens s'est important à titre d'exemple, le transport collectif, mais tu dis, ça ne m'interpelle pas de tout, mais-là, tu passes à côté de ton mandat. Tu es là pour prendre les décisions dans l'intérêt de la majorité et si eux autres disent non, on est intemporel, mais pourquoi si c'est le cas qu'ils gardent les églises un peu partout? ».

for whom the cathedral remained important. In other words, Forest expected the hierarchy to behave as a public institution and not as a denomination.

Strict secularist politicians like Parent worried that insisting upon the public nature of the Church was more divisive than unifying. Parent, like Mgr. Grondin, for that matter, saw a clear distinction between the religious and political spheres and did not appreciate having to negotiate the problems of the former. He explained that the archbishop's problems spill onto his desk:

There is a struggle between two groups, with diametrically opposed visions and no flexibility, who have an archbishop without leadership. It is the worst scenario. As a result, the city is torn apart. A large part of the population thinks that the City should stay away from this. Another part of the population says that the City should inject funds to save the cathedral. I think it's sad, but that's the reality⁶⁶⁸.

Regardless of the different groups' positions on the cathedral, it was the clergy and practising Catholics who ultimately held power over its destiny and when I spoke with them, their minds were made up. Abbé Roy posed a series of questions: "What is most important for the survival of the Church, for the progress of the Church, for the growth of the Church, the adaptation of the Church, today? What is the image of the Church that we have? Is it a community? A community of people who are here now, not the people of 1950?"⁶⁶⁹. For Abbé Roy, restoring the cathedral is not the answer to any of those questions. And while his religious evolution since his ordination has been considerable, Abbé Roy understood that most people still identified their faith with a building. From his experience he saw both sides. On the one hand,

⁶⁶⁸ *Idem.*, 31:00 mins., original: « Il y a une lutte entre deux groupes avec des visions diamétralement opposées, sans aucune flexibilité, qui ont un archevêque sans leadership, c'est le pire des scénarios. Comme résultat, la ville est tiraillée par ça. Une forte partie de la population pense que la ville doit se tenir loin de ça. Une autre portion de la population dit que la ville doit injecter les fonds pour sauvegarder la cathédrale. Je trouve ça triste, mais c'est la réalité ».

⁶⁶⁹ *Idem.*, 5:30 mins., original: « Qu'est-ce qui est le plus important pour la survie de l'Église, pour le progrès de l'Église, pour la croissance de l'Église, l'adaptation de l'Église, aujourd'hui? C'est quoi l'image de l'Église qu'on a? Est-ce que c'est une communauté, d'abord? Communauté des gens qui sont là maintenant, pas les gens de 1950? ».

some people need an alluring building, with the big celebrations that one attends from time to time when one wants, but for others the Church is something else. It is a community that comes together to celebrate, that comes together to help people, to share, to catechise children, to help couples, and to live life in general⁶⁷⁰.

Yet Abbé Roy admitted that, like Landry's group, he was "attached to heritage. It pain[ed] me to see the cathedral closed"⁶⁷¹, but between the cathedral and the propagation of the gospel, there was no contest. Abbé Lagacé was even more to the point. He said that he was not ordained to be a "museum curator"⁶⁷². As exhausted stewards of the cathedral, their answer was for the cathedral to be transformed like so many other churches had already been across Quebec.

3. *Three Possible Outcomes*

Back in 2014, when the parish council advisory committee was weighing the fate of the cathedral, there were only three options: 1), demolition, 2), transformation, or 3), restoration. In fact, these three scenarios are the same for every church closure, not just in Quebec, but everywhere. However, despite the triptych's generality, its interpretive power for the sociology of religion and the study of Quebec resides in the lengths to which partisans of each option would go to achieve their desired outcomes and the full range of strategies they employed. These roughly correspond to the dimensions addressed in the pages above: wielding authority, manipulations of legal and religious structures, political wrangling, and the invocation of cultural arguments. Although we

⁶⁷⁰ *Idem.*, 9:00 mins., original: « pour certains, il faut un édifice qui a de l'allure, avec les grandes célébrations que l'on entreprend à l'occasion quand on veut, mais, pour d'autres, l'Église est d'autre chose. C'est une communauté qui se regroupe pour célébrer, qui se regroupe pour aider les gens, pour partager, pour faire de la catéchèse des enfants, pour aider les couples, la vie quoi ».

⁶⁷¹ *Idem.*, 9:30 mins., original: « quoique je sois attaché aussi au patrimoine, il me fait de la peine de voir la cathédrale fermée ».

⁶⁷² *Idem.*, 48:00 mins., original: « Je dis toujours ce que je n'étais pas ordonné pour devenir gardien de musée, on a toujours à faire notre place, on était déplacé, on s'est déplacé peut-être nous-mêmes, on a fait notre place, mais pas la classe dominante, une place avec les autres, on fait un témoignage. Les églises qui en disparaissent, c'est une bonne chose parce que, les gens sont surtout attachés à leurs églises, puis ne pensent pas qu'on a besoin du personnel aussi pour annoncer la l'Évangile ».

now know in hindsight that partisans of an integral restoration triumphed, it bears briefly exploring the three scenarios.

a) *Scenario 1: Demolition:*

The surest and likely only way the cathedral could have been demolished would have been because of irreparable structural degradation, a situation which became increasingly likely with each winter, its roof remained unrepaired, its nave minimally heated, and Rimouskois' attachment unrenewed by Midnight Mass, Easter, baptisms, weddings, and funerals. All participants considered this scenario a very real possibility in 2020, with no end to the scandal in sight. Most thought that if no agreement could be reached within three to five years, the cathedral would be lost. In April 2020, the cathedral's furnace once again failed⁶⁷³. Vandalism presented a different kind of decay of the social variety. In March 2021 vandals broke into the cathedral and damaged the Casavant organ, a deed which would likely not have been committed had the hooligans been used to hearing its music⁶⁷⁴. These discouraging incidents aside, a court-ordered engineer's report – following the first court confrontation between the Diocese and the renegade churchwardens – found the cathedral to be in reasonably good health, in need of just \$350,000 in repairs to re-open and was thus unlikely to be condemned any time soon after⁶⁷⁵. The report also noted that the exterior netting was unnecessary and that all it achieved was to unnecessarily drill 3,400 holes in

⁶⁷³ See Julie Tremblay, « La cathédrale de Rimouski n'est plus chauffée », *Ici Radio-Canada – Bas-Saint-Laurent*, April 2, 2020, (web), consulted, April 23, 2020, <https://ici.radio-canada.ca/nouvelle/1690137/cathedrale-saint-germain-rimouski-travaux-chauffage-entretien>.

⁶⁷⁴ See Jean-François Racine, « Vandalisme et méfaits à l'intérieur de la cathédrale », *Le Journal de Québec*, March 24, 2021, (web), consulted October 7, 2021, <https://www.journaldequebec.com/2021/03/24/la-cathedrale-de-rimouski-vandalisee>.

⁶⁷⁵ See Simon Carmichael, « 350,000\$ nécessaires pour rouvrir la cathédrale de Rimouski 'fermée inutilement' », *Le Soleil*, August 12, 2020, (web), consulted November 2, 2021, <https://www.lesoleil.com/actualite/en-region/350-000-necessaires-pour-rouvrir-la-cathedrale-de-rimouski-fermee-inutilement-8dd369cb6d5cbd56ca8a7ccc7fc152d9#:~:text=Selon%20le%20rapport%20de%201,2%2C3%20millions%20de%20dollars.&text=Afin%20de%20pouvoir%20rouvrir%20la,de%20350%20000%20%24%20sont%20n%2C3%A9cessaires> es.

the cathedral walls⁶⁷⁶. Aside from its structural integrity, there was the theoretical risk that public opinion could turn against the cathedral; however, this scenario was fantastic. Some 94 per cent of Rimouskois opposed its demolition in 2017 and it would have cost far more to demolish than to restore⁶⁷⁷, even though some degree of demolition was not opposed during the consultations⁶⁷⁸.

b) Scenario 2: Transformation

If demolition was the worst-case scenario, and integral restoration was difficult to imagine under the 2020 administration – Mgr. Denis Grondin was young and not likely going anywhere –, then logically, transformation was the most probable outcome of Rimouski’s cathedral scandal: the only question for most actors was the scale. It was abundantly clear that Landry’s Coalition, as well as the renegade churchwardens, would absolutely not accept desacralisation, and the Diocese had long ago scrapped writing to Rome for permission to move the diocesan seat to Saint-Pie-X. Thus, the Diocese was limited to deciding what kind of transformation – or reanimation – could strike the balance between attracting the most local support and the most outside resources. Public support was strongly opposed to any significant change to the nave for both musical and religious reasons. A small space reserved for occasional religious practice as previously proposed would not satisfy anyone but those who sought to minimise Church participation in financing.

Once the Diocese accepted this reality, it would need to work to achieve consensus; otherwise, no government would invest. It seemed like this work had been advancing. Pascal Gagnon was

⁶⁷⁶ See Pierre Michaud, « 3 400 trous dans la cathédrale ... pour rien! », *Journal le soir*, August 12, 2020, (web), consulted November 2, 2021, <https://journallesoir.ca/2020/08/12/3-400-trous-dans-la-cathedrale-pour-rien/>.

⁶⁷⁷ See « Le maire de Rimouski met en garde l’Église dans le dossier de la cathédrale », *Radio-Canada*, July 5, 2017, (web), consulted August 6, 2026, <https://ici.radio-canada.ca/nouvelle/1043498/maire-interpelle-eglise-responsabilite-financiere-cathedrale-saint-germain-rimouski>.

⁶⁷⁸ See « L’avenir de la cathédrale Saint-Germain de Rimouski : Rapport d’analyse d’un sondage téléphonique auprès des Rimouskois », Léger, May 10, 2017, (web), consulted April 8, 2021. http://www.diocesisrimouski.com/consultation/rapports/rapport_sondage_leger_%202017.pdf.

optimistic that a plan to add new vocations to existing religious service already enjoyed unanimous support and that in 2020, the only thing standing in the way of progress was personalities⁶⁷⁹. Provincial representative Harold Lebel had been active throughout 2020 trying to establish consensus between stakeholders and trying to impress upon them the fact that once one was established, Culture Minister Nathalie Roy would be prepared to invest. Roy's investment, however, was contingent upon "regular use", meaning its vicarious religious functions would not suffice and that the cathedral needed to have another principal vocation along with religion⁶⁸⁰. In October 2020 Lebel, the City, the Diocese, and the Rimouski Heritage Society signed a document of support asking the Minister for heritage status, but ongoing litigation by Mgr. Grondin against the renegade wardens likely led to it joining previous requests on the Minister's shelves⁶⁸¹. Despite the aborted mediation between the renegade churchwardens and the Diocese in July 2021, mentioned above, multiple judicial rulings have rejected Diocese claims of negligence and affirmed their legal status as the cathedral's custodians. Instead of continuing to pursue them in court, Mgr. Grondin could recognise their service, having devoted nearly a decade to the cathedral's defence, along with Jacques Landry and his team. To establish a consensus, the Diocese would have to stop repressing an important part of its Church, which was supposed to be diverse and not monolithic, like some Protestant sects. Otherwise he would risk continuing to lose credibility, damage his Office, and his opponents would gain more influence.

⁶⁷⁹ See Pierre Michaud, « Pascal Gagnon est loin d'être découragé », *Journal le soir*, April 27, 2020, (web), consulted February 11, 2021, <https://journallesoir.ca/2020/04/27/pascal-gagnon-est-loin-detre-decourage/>.

⁶⁸⁰ See Johanne Fournier, « Cathédrale de Rimouski : Harold LeBel en appelle au consensus », *Le Soleil*, August 27, 2021, (web), consulted February 1, 2021, <https://www.lesoleil.com/actualite/en-region/cathedrale-de-rimouski-harold-lebel-en-appelle-au-consensus-18d2b99b78f9ad7702f24ef961aab095>.

⁶⁸¹ See Pierre Michaud, « Le consensus sur la cathédrale s'annonce difficile », *Journal le soir*, October 28, 2020, (web) consulted January 31, 2021, <https://journallesoir.ca/2020/08/28/le-consensus-sur-la-cathedrale-sannonce-difficile/#:~:text=Les%20r%C3%A9actions%20sont%20mitig%C3%A9es%20%C3%A0,de%20la%20cath%C3%A9drale%20de%20Rimouski>.

c) *Scenario 3: Restoration:*

The antithesis of demolition and the scenario which was realised in 2024 were the cathedral's integral restoration. For this scenario to materialise, all participants agreed in 2020 that the Parish would have to close and sell both Saint-Pie-X and Saint-Robert, and it was unclear if any buyers remained interested. At the same time, one or the other would eventually have to close in any case, as might Sacre-Coeur – although the latter enjoyed strong local support. Most foresaw Rimouski being served by only one church in future decades with Pointe-au-Père serving during the summer as a pilgrimage site. So, whether it would be the cathedral or Saint-Pie-X remained, until recently, an open question. Restoring the cathedral at the expense of the other churches would have met stiff resistance by parishioners of all three churches, who contributed the lion's share of resources to the parish. The final compromise was to limit Sunday Mass at Saint-Pie-X to two celebrations per month.

Dilemmas aside, Canon Law dictates that if a Mass is not celebrated within a church for seven years, it is *de facto* desacralised, something which would have made the cathedral's restoration unlikely. After just more than six years, a virtual Midnight Mass was celebrated from the cathedral in 2020, making its restoration still possible⁶⁸². That, however, was only a temporary positive sign of a complete restoration, though. Mgr. Denis Grondin refused to celebrate the following Easter Mass inside the cathedral⁶⁸³ and continued to pursue a judicial finding of negligence against the renegade churchwardens as unfit until 2022.

⁶⁸² See Johanne Fournier, « Première Messe de Minuit en six ans dans la cathédrale de Rimouski », *Le Soleil*, December 21, 2020, (web), consulted November 2, 2021, <https://www.lesoleil.com/actualite/en-region/premiere-messe-de-noel-en-six-ans-dans-la-cathedrale-de-rimouski-69acb3019a42841fdf01b2a4e802f2a9>.

⁶⁸³ See Pierre Michaud, « L'avocate de la Fabrique Saint-Germain interpelle la Ville de Rimouski », *Journal de soir*, March 29, 2021, (web), consulted April 27, 2021, <https://journallesoir.ca/2021/03/29/lavocate-de-la-fabrique-saint-germain-interpelle-la-ville-de-rimouski/>.

Thus, the cathedral's restoration was conditional on a radical change at the bishop's palace, a scenario likewise within the realm of possibility. In July 2020, local press published a rumour that the archbishop was set to abdicate his throne and return to Quebec City⁶⁸⁴. Though he later denied the claim, the boldness of the published gossip only further evidenced his weakened position. He might have wished he did leave because in September of the same year Grondin's leadership faced further censure, this time from within his own ranks.

The Economic Affairs Council rejected allocating \$300,000 over three years from the foundations to continue employing Jean Crépault as project manager for the cathedral project, whose approach members of the council opposed⁶⁸⁵. Meanwhile, treasurer Michel Lavoie resigned, clearing the way for Mgr. Grondin to ignore his council and replace the unpopular treasurer with an unliked project manager, naming him "episcopal manager"⁶⁸⁶.

In 2021, the archbishop offered to sell his newly restored palace and use the proceeds to partially finance the cathedral's restoration as part of a mediation between himself and the renegade churchwardens⁶⁸⁷. However, he failed to consult the other ten priests who live there – they were not impressed – and failed to consider that the building he was prepared to sell had been restored

⁶⁸⁴ See Pierre Michaud, « Monseigneur Grondin prépare son départ », *Journal le soir*, July 8, 2020, (web), consulted November 2, 2021, <https://journallesoir.ca/2020/07/08/monseigneur-grondin-preparerait-son-depart/>.

⁶⁸⁵ See Michel-Félix Tremblay, « Cathédrale de Rimouski : un contrat soulève des tensions à l'archevêché », *Ici Bas-Saint-Laurent*, June 23, 2020, (web), consulted January 2, 2021, <https://ici.radio-canada.ca/nouvelle/1712539/diocese-rimouski-conseil-economique-monseigneur-mgrondin-cathedrale-charge-projet#:~:text=Cath%C3%A9drale%20de%20Rimouski%20%3A%20un%20contrat%20soul%C3%A8ve%20des%20tensions%20%C3%A0%20l'Archev%C3%A9ch%C3%A9,Les%20membres%20du&text=L'embauche%20d'un%20charg%C3%A9,de%20Rimouski%2C%20monseigneur%20Denis%20Grondin..>

⁶⁸⁶ See Pierre Michaud, « Changement de garde à l'Archevêché », *Journal le soir*, June 22, 2020, (web), consulted January 2, 2021, <https://journallesoir.ca/2020/06/22/changement-de-garde-a-larcheveche/>.

⁶⁸⁷ See Michel-Félix Tremblay, « Mgr. Grondin prêt à sacrifier l'archevêché pour sauver la cathédrale », March 30, 2021, (web) consulted October 7, 2021, <https://ici.radio-canada.ca/nouvelle/1781031/cathedrale-rimouski-patrimoine-sauvegarde-grondin>.

by various levels of government and the people of the diocese⁶⁸⁸. Nevertheless, this episode represented the closest the saga had come to an outcome of restoration up to that point – Mgr. Grondin even moved his throne from Saint-Pie-X back to Saint-Germain, suggesting the possibility of an integral restoration. In the meantime, mediation talks stalled due to disagreement among the renegade churchwardens, meaning that restoration, if possible, was even further away⁶⁸⁹.

On top of internal dissension, Mgr. Grondin faced unrelenting pressure from cultural Catholics. The Diocesan Coalition to Save the Cathedral boasted nearly 5,000 subscriptions in 2020, a critical mass of local and regional residents, which was hard to ignore. Their sheer demographic weight and political influence eventually attracted government support and weakened diocesan resolve. Things started to move in December 2021 when Mgr. Grondin reached an understanding with two of the four renegade churchwardens, Albert Carré and Victor Lepage – Jean-Charles Lechasseur and Nathalie Leblond refused to reconcile⁶⁹⁰. Next, the archbishop appointed a new Parish Council president, replacing Lechasseur with retired businessman Jean-Paul Heppell⁶⁹¹ in March 2022. The Archdiocese dropped its lawsuit against renegade churchwardens Jean-Charles Lechasseur and Nathalie Blondin on the condition they resigned from the Saint-Germain Parish Council, which they did. In response, in April 2022, Mgr. Grondin announced his intention to restore and re-open the

⁶⁸⁸ See Charles Lepage, « Archevêché de Rimouski : la possible vente ne fait pas l'unanimité », *L'Avantage, Votre journal*, April 14, 2021, (web), consulted October 7, 2021, <https://www.lavantage.qc.ca/article/2021/04/14/archeveche-de-rimouski-la-possible-vente-ne-fait-pas-l-unaninite>.

⁶⁸⁹ See Michel-Félix Tremblay, « Tentative d'entente avortée dans le dossier de la cathédrale », *Ici Bas-Saint-Laurent*, July 12, 2021, (web), consulted October 7, 2021, <https://ici.radio-canada.ca/nouvelle/1808472/fabrique-cathedrale-litige-amiable-annulation-lechasseur-proces-archeveche-rimouski>.

⁶⁹⁰ See Michel-Félix Tremblay, « Cathédrale de Rimouski : L'Archidiocèse s'entend avec 2 des 4 marguilliers », *Ici Bas-Saint-Laurent*, November 2, 2021, (web), consulted November 14, 2024, <https://ici.radio-canada.ca/nouvelle/1836618/cathedrale-rimouski-entente-avenir-marguillier-archidiocese>.

⁶⁹¹ See Julie Tremblay, « L'Archevêché nomme un nouveau président à la Fabrique Saint-Germain », *Ici Bas-Saint-Laurent*, December 15, 2021, (web), consulted November 14, 2024, <https://ici.radio-canada.ca/nouvelle/1847386/president-fabrique-saint-germain-cathedrale-rimouski-jean-paul-hepell-jean-charles-lechasseur>

cathedral after its nearly eight-year closure, apart from a few extraordinary celebrations⁶⁹². A final *coup de grâce* arrived in October 2023 when the Québec government awarded the cathedral the highest level of heritage status, which meant access to considerable funds for a legally mandated restoration⁶⁹³. Yet again, that Christmas, Midnight Mass was held and Heppell promised Rimouskois it represented the first step of the cathedral's permanent re-opening, noting that the Parish had already invested \$300,000 in repairs, received a \$100,000 donation from a parishioner to restore the parish hall and that work on replacing the roof would begin in the spring of 2024⁶⁹⁴.

4. *Significance for the local and National Church*

Rimouski's cathedral scandal was sparked by a practical question, fuelled by underlying socio-religious tension, and stoked by clerical ideology, on the one hand, and identity populism on the other, which together kept the conflict blazing for eight years. Its intensity has waned but the social damage it has wrought on the community, and the institution is worse than what eight years of neglect have inflicted on the building itself.

a) *Practical Considerations*

The practical question was: in a city with nine churches and 3,000 weekly practitioners, in 2007, which churches do we save, and which do we close? Though the answers were never obvious, each church had their own individual dynamics. The immediate answer was never: "definitely the

⁶⁹² See Julie Tremblay, « L'archevêque de Rimouski souhaite refaire de la cathédrale un lieu de rassemblement », *Ici Bas-Saint-Laurent*, April 11, 2022, (web), consulted November 14, 2024, <https://ici.radio-canada.ca/nouvelle/1875627/cathedrale-saint-germain-rimouski-avenir-mgr-denis-grondin-archeveche-fin-litige-vente-grand-seminaire>.

⁶⁹³ See « La cathédrale de Rimouski reconnue comme immeuble patrimonial », *Ici Bas-Saint-Laurent*, October 31, 2023, (web), consulted November 14, 2024, <https://ici.radio-canada.ca/nouvelle/2022789/cathedrale-saint-germain-rimouski-patrimoine-eglise-protection>.

⁶⁹⁴ See Paul Fontaine, « La cathédrale de Rimouski en voie de réouverture pour de bon », *Ici Bas-Saint-Laurent*, December 24, 2023, (web), consulted November 14, 2024, <https://ici.radio-canada.ca/nouvelle/2037334/fabrique-saint-germain-toiture-eglise-patrimoine-noel>.

cathedral” – to anyone except for those at the Diocese and the fused parish council. In formulating the answer to that question, people must have asked themselves: “do we save the oldest and most historically significant?” Or instead “should we keep smaller, newer, less expensive churches, more suited to the religious needs of contemporary practising Catholics?”. The very fact that the answer to both questions was an unqualified “yes” to two groups of Catholics is what reveals an underlying socio-religious division, one which Fabien Venon shows has been widening at least since the 1998 Synod of the Diocese of Montréal established a new course for the Quebec Church, one which abandoned efforts to keep churches open in the hopes of religious renewal⁶⁹⁵. While all other medium-sized cities, like Trois-Rivières, Chicoutimi, Sherbrooke, Rouyn-Noranda, etc., have also faced this dilemma, none of them have chosen to close their oldest churches. The usual pattern is to work from the newest churches backward. This makes sense given that the oldest churches usually have heritage status, which comes with considerable funding. However. The Diocese in Rimouski arranged it so that the City’s newest churches had status and its oldest did not, considerably changing the closure dynamic and in so doing, forcing a confrontation of two worldviews, each fiercely held by large swaths of Rimouski’s, and Quebec’s, population.

The difference between Rimouski and other Quebec dioceses, which explains the degree of conflict, is threefold. First, there was the incomprehensible heritage evaluation likely orchestrated by treasurer Michel Lavoie dating back to the early 2000s. Second, the Diocese of Rimouski had been known as a bastion of progressive and democratic Catholicism, a style personified by Mgr. Fournier and Mgr. Blanchette and one which attracted orthodox and cultural Catholics alike. Mgr. Fournier’s, and his predecessors’ charisma, maintained links between Modernist, Traditionalist,

⁶⁹⁵ See Fabien Venon, *Les paroisses de Montréal en crise : La fin d’un bastion catholique?*, Paris, L’Harmattan, 2012.

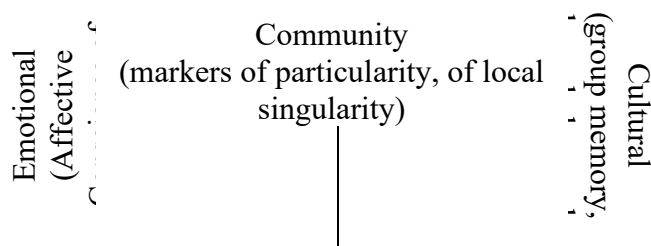
and Cultural Catholics, which made the presence of the archbishop in the city a source of widespread pride and distinction. Had Mgr. Fournier not died so suddenly, all participants agreed the conflict would likely never have occurred to the extent it did and, as Abbé Lagacé observed, was likely a long brewing boil that inevitably had to be lanced. Many respondents likewise attributed Mgr. Fournier's death to the stress imposed upon him by his curia, who an observer such as myself would place in a different ideological camp, one closer to Cardinal Jean-Paul-Turcotte, who radically changed Church policy, from parish mutual aid, to closure, and his successor cardinal Marc Ouellette's –known as a “soldier of the Faith” and a proponent of authoritarian Catholicism. The difference in styles expresses what E.-Martin Meunier describes as the post-Vatican II tension between reformers and conservatives, divided by a vision for a smaller but more orthodox Church as opposed to, one more reconciled with contemporary cultural norms⁶⁹⁶. Did Mgr. Denis Grondin's nomination represent a takeover of one orientation's stronghold by another on the ascent across Quebec? Usually, the Assembly of Quebec's Catholic Bishops – of which Mgr. Fournier was president - carries the most weight in the nomination process of new bishops; however, Cardinal Marc Ouellet happened to be in Quebec City for his mother's funeral when Mgr. Fournier died. Mgr. Denis Grondin accompanied the cardinal to the funeral and by March, anonymous sources were leaking his name as the leading candidate, and very likely the only one⁶⁹⁷. Whereas Mgr. Fournier was eulogised as a “man of the people”, Mgr. Grondin spent months without ever appearing in public and sometimes more than a year without speaking to the press. Where Mgr. Fournier and Mgr. Blanchet consulted during the fusion and closure processes, Mgr. Grondin decreed in unprecedented ways. The radical difference in visions of the Church between

⁶⁹⁶ See E.-Martin Meunier, *Le Pari personnaliste*, Montreal, Fides, 2007.

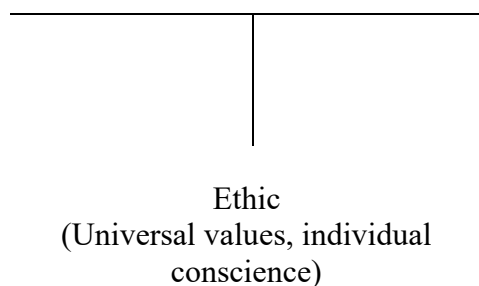
⁶⁹⁷ See Pierre Michaud, « Archevêché de Rimouski : Mgr. Grondin réagit à la rumeur », *L'Avantage, Votre journal*, March 11, 2015, (web), consulted October 17, 2021, <https://www.lavantage.qc.ca/Actualites/Societe/2015-03-11/article-4073652/Archeveche-de-Rimouski%3A-Mgr-Grondin-reagit-a-la-rumeur/1>.

what Rimouskois were used to and that of their new episcopal leader might explain the depth and width of the scandal prompted by a single question: which churches do we keep and which do we let go?

The answer for traditionalist Catholics, grassroots civil society and open secularist politicians was to preserve the oldest and most beautiful option. For Modernist Catholics, institutional civil society, and strict secularist politicians, the only viable option was to desacralise and transform Saint-Germain-de-Rimouski. While the sense of Catholicism for Modernist Catholics is complicated, an important part is undeniably where they practise and with whom. There is also a certain subcultural dynamic among Modernist Catholics who feel abandoned by a secular society whose values they reject. As such, among this group – which includes large segments of younger clergy – there is very little support for maintaining the heritage infrastructure, which serves what Grace Davie calls “vicarious religion”. In contrast, for Cultural and Traditionalist Catholics, religion is synonymous with heritage and thus separating historic churches, like the cathedral, from the Church is total anathema: place is inseparable from faith, and faith intimately tied to identity⁶⁹⁸.



⁶⁹⁸ See Grace Davie, "From believing without belonging to vicarious religion", in Daniel V.A. Olson & Detlef Pollack (dirs.), *The Role of Religion in Modern Societies*, 2008.



b) *Theoretical Implications*

Still in 1999 Danièle Hervieu-Léger predicted the breakdown of the institutional Church's ability to

regulate the various poles of Catholic identification as a product of diminished institutional authority and increased individual autonomy to construct their own Catholic identity. On one axis, she predicted a pulling apart of those attracted to community identification, marked by particularity, which would be opposed by an opposite force attracting members towards an ethic, characterised by universal individuality. On the other axis, Hervieu-Léger opposes a religiosity

Figure 3 Danièle Hervieu-Léger's modern trajectories of religion

based on emotional experience, versus one rooted in

lineage and cultural practice⁶⁹⁹. Cultural Catholics would fall in the top-right quadrant, while clergy and congregational minded Modernist Catholics fit in the bottom left. The autonomisation or de-articulation of each dimension produces the two poles we see in Rimouski. Following Hervieu-Léger's formulation: late modernity transforms formerly national Churches into, on the one hand, belief without tradition, and on the other collective memory, which loses its spiritually active character, constituted as a heritage of memory which no longer mobilises common belief⁷⁰⁰. The effect of this development leads to what Hervieu-Léger calls exculturation, where religion retreats from society, becoming counter-cultural and society, in turn, becomes indifferent to religion's normative authority⁷⁰¹. Quebec sociologist E.-Martin Meunier and Sarah Wilkins-Laflamme observed the phenomenon's appearance in Quebec in 2015. They perceived the end of one era in which Quebec culture was largely characterised by ambient cultural Catholicism and

⁶⁹⁹ See Danièle Hervieu-Léger, *Le Pèlerin et le converti : la religion en mouvement*, Paris, Flammarion, 1999, p. 78.

⁷⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

⁷⁰¹ See Danièle Hervieu-Léger, *Catholicisme, la fin d'un monde*, Paris, Bayard, 2003.

the beginning of another where religion's place within dominant society would be extremely precarious⁷⁰².

So how can Rimouski's experience shed light on how these theoretical dynamics are empirically occurring? On the one hand, much like clergy and Modernist Catholics across Quebec have abdicated their public social role, opting instead to concentrate their efforts for survival on a restrained but dedicated membership in the private sphere. However, on the other hand, we do not see general cultural indifference as the exculturation model would predict. Instead, what we see is that the city's Cultural Catholics have fiercely resisted what little remained of their official connection to religion – its public role as a still-potent symbol and shared memory. In fact, it is doubtful that the cathedral was ever discussed so widely and often in its more than 150-year history. In other words, the conflict shows that many Rimouskois were stuck between the poles resisting the separation.

Although I agree that Quebec and Rimouski's cultural Catholicism socio-religious configuration is indeed giving way to one where religion and even the memory of religion will inevitably play a much-diminished public role, I suggest that the past 20 years of church closures, and indeed of Church closure, represents a brief but explosive moment of de-privatisation of religion in Quebec, a religion that for 40 years people have simultaneously rejected and cherished from a distance. The experience of church closures forces the resolution of this ambivalence by compelling people to take an ultimate position on the Church, faith, the Nation, and the future of memory in Quebec.

⁷⁰² See E.-Martin Meunier & Sarah Wilkins-Laflamme, « Sécularisation, Catholicisme et transformation du régime de religiosité au Québec. Étude comparative avec le Catholicisme au Canada (1968-2007) », *Recherches Sociographiques*, 52(3), 2011, p. 689. <https://www.erudit.org/fr/revues/rs/2011-v52-n3-rs5005802/1007655ar.pdf>, p. 689. <https://www.erudit.org/fr/revues/rs/2011-v52-n3-rs5005802/1007655ar.pdf>.

The stark choice presented by closure, in this case, accelerated exculturation's polarising tendency. Non-practising Catholics in Rimouski overwhelmingly supported the preservation of religious heritage out of an identity commitment to tradition, but since 2014 they have had to face a dilemma: privatised religion, or denominations simply do not liturgically need cathedrals, and the public sphere rejects the ecclesiastical authority they embody. This leaves cultural Catholics, for whom the cathedral's history and majesty are crucially important to their worldview, torn between the two poles, demanding neither dogmatism nor secularism. Instead, they carry the banner of "religious heritage", which for a few more decades may increasingly become the religious content of Quebec's transitional public religion – an identity religious movement that bridges the cultural Catholicism configuration to a religious regime scholars like E. Martin Meunier and Jacob Legault-Leclair predict may be rooted more in normative charters and laws⁷⁰³. Based on memory, tradition and identity, the concept of "religious heritage" is at once more familiar than the contemporary liturgy and Church culture, but also more demanding than cultural Catholicism in that it implies a certain degree of political engagement from its adherents. While most Cultural Catholics, politicians of all stripes, as well as both levels of civil society who subscribe to a worldview in which religious heritage is an integral component, would have been happy for the *status quo* of the past 40 years to reign indefinitely, the Church has decided, for multiple reasons, that it could no longer shoulder that burden⁷⁰⁴. However, what Rimouski shows us the Church's impotence. Not even an archbishop, can command religious culture and that, at least for the coming decades, cultural Catholicism remains a vital, if waning force in Quebec, one that the Church

⁷⁰³ See E.-Martin Meunier & Jacob Legault-Leclair, "Nones and Catholics in Québec: The Social Reconfiguration of Bill 21", *Secular Studies*, 3, 2021, p. 93-117.

⁷⁰⁴ The secular desire to maintain religion as a social utility, just in case of joyful or tragic events, major life milestones and as repositories of cultural meaning. See Grace Davie, 2008, *Op. Cit.*, p. 173.

would do well to accommodate rather than combat. In Rimouski, the disconnect between clergy and the resource presented by Cultural Catholics could not be starker.

I would like to conclude with a final thought, which again draws on the thought of Fernand Dumont's conception of the reference or as Gregory Baum formulates it, the symbolic reference. Baum applies Dumont's conceptualisation of the reference by evoking the example of the Leadership Conference of Women Religious which was condemned in 2008 by the Roman Congregation of the Doctrine of Faith for suspicions of their disagreement with official teaching on women and sexuality. Baum observes that the vast majority of Catholics were appalled by the decision. He writes that for

ordinary Catholics these women confirm *la référence*: they strengthen the identification of believers with the Catholic tradition. They give witness to love, justice, compassion, and fidelity to truth summoned forth by the Christian Gospel⁷⁰⁵

I see the same dynamic with Catholic outrage over church closures. Churches, especially old ones, represent the best parts of Catholicism: sacrifice for community, wonder, beauty, and transcendence. Their closure represents a moment of duplication, which Dumont describes in his 1987 work, *L'institution de la théologie*, as happening when the "human experience in response to an obstacle prompts the recovery of a tradition that provides memory and hope"⁷⁰⁶. Exploring the aftermath of cases of other churches who have successfully re-opened as primarily religious spaces following a contested closure could yield fruitful comparisons, such as Montreal's Très-Saint-Nom-de-Jésus, closed in 2007 and reopened in response to public pressure in 2014, one of the only other examples of a diocese integrally restoring a church. It would be interesting to

⁷⁰⁵ See Gregory Baum, *Fernand Dumont: A Sociologist Turns to Theology*, McGill-Queen's University Press, 2015, p.56.

⁷⁰⁶ *Idem.* p. 64.

examine this kind of experience with other religiously positive outcomes, such as municipal partnerships, to try to understand how overcoming closure can be interpreted as reinforcing their church and the Church as an ongoing source of identification, despite conflict with ecclesiastical authority.

V. Chapter Three, Description of Saint-Jean-Baptiste de Québec

A. Introduction



Figure 4 Saint-Jean-Baptiste Church

Only six months after Saint-Germain de Rimouski's controversial closure, another even higher-profile Quebec Church closed, crossing the threshold for what had here thereto been unimaginable: shuttering Saint-Jean-Baptiste, located in the heart of the *vieille capitale*. Once considered an "untouchable" during the heritage planning of the 1990s⁷⁰⁷, Saint-Jean-Baptiste's closure signalled a new stage in the church closure phenomenon. The only other old, massive, and ornate churches to have been closed up to this point were, of course, the cathedral in Rimouski (but

lacking recognised heritage value) and Très-Saint-Nom-de-Jésus in Montreal's Hochelaga-Maisonneuve neighbourhood in 2009. While the latter was renovated and reopened in 2012, the former seems likely to enjoy the same fate in the medium term. As such, Saint-Jean-Baptiste's closure offers a unique perspective of what can happen when a church that is universally acknowledged as possessing unparalleled national and local heritage value can no longer be

⁷⁰⁷ See Alain Bouchard, « Indulgences pour l'Église », *Le Soleil*, April 8, 1999, p. A1.

supported by a dwindling congregation of several hundred people who are largely elderly, poor or both. What kinds of challenges do triumphant style 19th century churches present with respect to finding new and appropriate vocations? How does a society reconcile that the very elements which create priceless heritage also impose a heavy financial burden? What happens to practising Catholics once their church closes and they are forced to pray elsewhere? The following portrait will present a detailed account of the circumstances that raise these questions. It will be followed by another chapter dedicated to an ethnographic exercise conducted in the summer of 2020.

This chapter will present the details of Saint-Jean-Baptiste's closure across four periods, which are distinguished according to the church's progressive closure. We begin with 1), the 1990s, when the church's future went unquestioned; then proceed to 2), a period starting in 2010, marked by financial uncertainty and pastoral reorientation. This second period is likewise a time when actors actively sought long-term solutions to financial sustainability. From 3), 2015 until 2018, a third period presents itself characterised by complementary grass roots and political responses demonstrating a serious commitment to finding a new community-oriented vocation. Though many creative projects were proposed, mounting tension between the City of Quebec and the Diocese of Quebec over funding formulas led to the fourth and final period of 4), 2019-2022 characterised by open conflict, stalled progress as well as issue fatigue.

B. Periodisation

1. *Concerned Confidence: leading up to the 1990s*

When Saint-Jean-Baptiste celebrated its last Mass, the Diocese had already been marked by several waves of closures. If, in 1995, the Diocese of Quebec comprised 269 parishes, 20 years

later in May 2015 that figure had declined to 201⁷⁰⁸. In Quebec City these closures notably included significant churches, such as Saint-Coeur-de-Marie, Saint-Patrick, Notre-Dame-du-Chemin, Notre-Dame-de-Grâce, Saint-Joseph, and Saint-Vincent de Paul, all of which, except Saint-Vincent-de-Paul, which was left vacant, were controversially demolished and transformed into condominiums. Nevertheless, it is understandable that most people assumed Saint-Jean-Baptiste immune to closure owing to its 1999 municipal heritage evaluation of “untouchable”.

The evaluation was carried out as part of a collaboration between the City, the Ministry of Culture and Communications, and the Diocese of Quebec, aimed at drafting a policy to guide how the stakeholders manage religious heritage⁷⁰⁹. The committee evaluated 37 churches, 16 of which it deemed “untouchable”, 10 were considered “protected”, which mandated that at least the exteriors be maintained, and the other 11 were deemed appropriate for sale, transformation, or demolition⁷¹⁰. In addition to the municipal evaluation, the National Assembly had named Saint-Jean-Baptiste a national historic monument in 1991, leading many to believe that it was too important to fail. Surely, assumed most parties, the government, business, parishioners, the City, or the neighbourhood association would never allow a national monument of religious, cultural and political importance wither away in plain sight. For the 90-95 per cent of residents who rarely attend Mass and who pay little attention to parish news, the February 2015 announcement thus came as a shock and disrupted what they assumed was and was not possible with respect to the decades-long church closure phenomenon. In their letters to the editor, correspondence with the Parish and media interviews were consistently dumbfounded that such an historically important

⁷⁰⁸ See « Les fabriques en 2014, Mémo-AF », Département des fabriques de l'Église catholique de Québec, 13(1), May 2015, p.1., (web), consulted August 7, 2022, https://fabriques.eccdq.org/wp-content/uploads/memo_af_juin_2015.pdf.

⁷⁰⁹ See Alain Bouchard, *Op. Cit.*

⁷¹⁰ *Ibid.*

building could be closed at all. One resident who wrote the parish priest worried that “[I]f nothing is done to safeguard this local "spirit", then I will sincerely wonder if Quebec has not lost its ... soul?”⁷¹¹. How did the church metamorphose from the neighbourhood’s crown jewel into its white elephant?

a) *History of Saint-Jean-Baptiste*

Saint-Jean-Baptiste’s history stretches back to the initial development of the neighbourhood during the mid-19th century, as Quebec’s first *faubourg*, or neighbourhood outside of the fortifications. In 1847, as a dependency of Notre-Dame-de-Québec, the neighbourhood established its first church after the great fire of 1845 made land available for construction. Another fire, that of 1881, rased the first church, which was quickly rebuilt on the same foundations but this time employing the Second Empire style with an eye towards marking the neighbourhood out visually as a francophone space. Finally in 1886, the area served by the new church received its canonic erection as an independent parish⁷¹².

The church’s monumental scale is evident from routes leading into the city. Looking up towards the Upper Town, Saint-Jean-Baptiste’s generous nave and soaring steeple, perched on the cliffs, dominate the skyline. Originally built to serve the working-class neighbourhood at the turn of the century, the church’s roughly 2,500-person capacity reflects the period’s socio-demographic reality. More than 25,000 parishioners belonged to Saint-Jean-Baptiste⁷¹³ before the appeal of the new suburbs began drawing residents out of the urban core, and after changing sexual mores

⁷¹¹ See (private letter) Guy Boivin, to Abb. Pierre Gingras, curé Paroisse Saint-Jean-Baptiste, February 19, 2015, original: « *Si rien n'est fait pour sauvegarder cet "esprit" de clocher, je me demanderai alors sincèrement si le Québec n'a pas perdu son ... âme?* ».

⁷¹² See Jean-François Caron, « L'Église Saint-Jean-Baptiste », *Le Journal de Québec*, May 9, 2021, p. 26.

⁷¹³ See André Charbonneau & Marc Vallières, *Histoire de Québec et de sa région*, Quebec City, Les Presses de l'Université Laval, 2008.

dramatically reduced the size of families. From the perspective of that dense demographic context, the church does not seem out of proportion in the way that it increasingly has since the Quiet Revolution⁷¹⁴.

As for the neighbourhood itself, over the years it has become less working class and more so a neighbourhood of transients (two-thirds) and the very poor who rub shoulders with artists and intellectuals⁷¹⁵. Neither group is famous for its assiduous religious practice. On the other hand, while Sunday Mass dwindled to 500 people out of 6,000 parishioners during the 1990s⁷¹⁶, intensive use of the Church by social justice and community groups meant that the Saint-Jean-Baptiste maintained its central social role in neighbourhood life⁷¹⁷. Beyond its important community functions, Saint-Jean-Baptiste continued to play host to massively attended religious ceremonies on Christmas, Easter, Saint-Jean-Baptiste Day and for national celebrations and tragedies, such as when the church held the funerals for three police officers who died in a helicopter crash in 1993⁷¹⁸, reflecting the church's integral role within the ongoing vitality of cultural Catholicism.

b) Cultural Catholicism Rises to the Occasion

So, while its symbolic and cultural functions remained unchanged since the apogee of the Quiet Revolution, Saint-Jean-Baptiste's political profile increased at the same rate as its regular religious practice and thus finances continued a slow but steady decline. On the political front, as mentioned above, a growing heritage consciousness, coupled with the accelerating phenomenon of church

⁷¹⁴ See Simon Langlois, « Fermeture de l'église Saint-Jean-Baptiste et fin des paroisses », *Regards sur la société*, les blogues de contact de l'Université Laval, May 6, 2015, (web), consulted August 8, 2022, http://www.contact.ulaval.ca/article_blogue/fermeture-de-leglise-saint-jean-baptiste-et-fin-des-paroisses/.

⁷¹⁵ See Louis-Guy Lemieux, « Une église exemplaire », *Le Soleil*, January 18, 1995, p. B2.

⁷¹⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷¹⁷ In 1995, 10 associations comprising more than 100 volunteers used the church to meet the basic needs of hundreds of residents, *Ibid.*

⁷¹⁸ See Normand Provencher, « Un cortège de 1500 policiers aux funérailles », *Le Soleil*, October 29, 1993, p. A1.

closure and demolition meant that policy makers and the public began taking religious heritage seriously. In 1994, religious heritage scholars Luc Noppen (Architecture) and Lucie K. Morisset (History of Architecture) accepted a commission from Quebec City to assemble an inventory of the city's churches and to rank them according to heritage value to help guide future decisions of which churches to conserve⁷¹⁹. The report's authors recommended classing 16 of the city's 33 Catholic churches and 18 chapels (pre-amalgamation) as "monuments"⁷²⁰. Churches were ranked according to their structural condition and monumental potential, something they measured by assessing the public's adhesion to a place of worship⁷²¹. The 16 churches included nearly all pre-1945 churches but not the churches, which already had heritage status such as Saint-Jean-Baptiste and Notre-Dame-de-Québec. Submitted to the City and the Diocese for consideration, the 1,000-page report's principal message was that authorities should try to save only 40 per cent of the city's churches instead of pursuing the present patchwork, reactive grant system, which Noppen and Morisset warned would save none.

Moreover, the report highlighted that religious heritage is ultimately a provincial competency and, as such, recommended the creation of an arm's-length oversight commission to administer future programs, something Quebec did the following year with the creation of the Religious Heritage Foundation of Quebec.

On the parish level, 1994 also saw the creation of a committee devoted to preserving and promoting the parish's religious heritage and particularly the church's structure. They set a fundraising goal

⁷¹⁹ See Luc Noppen & Lucie k. Morisset, « Lieux de culte situés sur le territoire de la Ville de Québec », Quebec City, Service de l'urbanisme, Division du design urbain et du patrimoine, 1994.

⁷²⁰ See Damien Gagnon, « Statut de monument à 16 églises de Québec », *Le Soleil*, December 8, 1994, p. B1.

⁷²¹ See Jacques Des Rochers, « Nouvelles vocations et conversions : les biens religieux et la société civile québécoise au tournant du XXI^e siècle », *Perspective*, 3, 2008, pp. 571-578, <http://journals.openedition.org/perspective/3310> ; DOI : <https://doi.org/10.4000/perspective.3310>.

of \$500,000, half of which they hoped to receive from parishioners and local businesses. They solicited corporations, religious orders and the public at large for the other half. Reaching that goal would entitle them to a further \$350,000 in government subsidies⁷²². All this work was, by and large, successful in attracting funding to Saint-Jean-Baptiste and establishing Quebec City as an international leader in the domain of religious heritage⁷²³. In 1994 the Diocese received \$3 million in infrastructure funding from the Quebec government, which, among other projects, was used to repair the church's exterior masonry⁷²⁴. Clergy were satisfied with the government's surprisingly eager response to calls for funds. When questioned about the appropriateness of the Church receiving State funds, Archbishop Mgr. Maurice Couture responded that he was not at all ashamed for taking a helping hand from the Quebec government, noting that "[m]ore than 150,000 people attend the churches of the diocese every weekend. That's more than the best attendance at Expos games!"⁷²⁵ The Archbishop did, however, warn local parishes that the new "intelligent partnership" between the Church and State should not lead to de-responsibilisation of parish councils in terms of building maintenance⁷²⁶.

After years of negotiations and only months after the 1999 demolition of Notre-Dame-du-Chemin, the Diocese, the City and the Quebec government signed a "Joint Declaration", with respect to the heritage evaluation of Quebec's churches⁷²⁷. The declaration adopted Noppen and Morisset's

⁷²² See Louis-Guy Lemieux, « Une église exemplaire », *Le Soleil*, January 18, 1995, p. B2.

⁷²³ Québec City hosted the First International Conference on religious heritage in 1997, *Premier colloque international sur l'Avenir des biens d'Église*.

⁷²⁴ See Gilbert Leduc, « Réfections des églises de la région de Québec », *Le Soleil*, August 2, 1994, p. A1.

⁷²⁵ See Gilbert Leduc, « Québec a déniché un 'p'tit' trois millions pour les églises de Québec », *Le Soleil*, August 3, 1994, p. A3, original : « il n'a pas du tout honte de recevoir le coup de pouce du gouvernement du Québec pour rénover les églises. Il passe plus de 150,000 personnes toutes les fins de semaine dans les églises du diocèse. C'est plus que les meilleures assistances aux matchs des Expos! ».

⁷²⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷²⁷ Only after the sale and demolition of Notre-Dame-du-Chemin in January, which the agreement would have prevented.

heritage designations, which placed 16 churches off-limits for transformations⁷²⁸. Along with the classification, the agreement came with promises of considerable funding from the City and Quebec. To solve the problem of long-term funding as well as to systematise religious heritage grant distribution, various religious heritage experts and clergy established the Religious Heritage Foundation of Quebec as an arm's-length institution, which received largely provincial funding, but also some federal and Church money. So, just as it seemed that Saint-Jean-Baptiste's perennity was assured, following remarkable cooperation by all levels of government, the Church and the community, a new challenge presented itself: parish fusion.

2. *Towards a New Millennium: A Marriage of Convenience, 1999-2004*

Parishioners learned of the proposed merger on February 7, 1999, from their parish bulletins. The plan would annex the already fused adjoining parishes of the recently demolished Notre-Dame-du-Chemin and Saint-Martyrs-Canadiens to that of Saint-Jean-Baptiste⁷²⁹. Few details were available except that Saint-Jean-Baptiste would be reduced to one Mass on Sundays. Parishioners quickly understood that the fusion would ultimately mean the closure of one of the two churches, but the cultural differences between the two parishes generated more immediate conflict between the two parishes. As noted above, Saint-Jean-Baptiste was a poor, low-practising parish that depended on the Church more as a centre for charitable services and community space as opposed to an income-generating parish like Saints-Martyrs-Canadiens with 12,000 comparatively more active, bourgeois parishioners living in the Montcalm neighbourhood⁷³⁰.

⁷²⁸ See Alain Bouchard, « Indulgences pour l'Église », *Le Soleil*, April 8, 1999, p. A1.

⁷²⁹ See Pierre Lacouline, « L'avenir de la paroisse des Saints-Martyrs Canadiens de Québec », *Le Soleil*, February 22, 1999, p. B8.

⁷³⁰ *Ibid.*

For parishioners of Saint-Jean-Baptiste, the merger meant losing control of parish governance structures as well as the discomfort of having to compete for their interests against those of their well-heeled neighbours. Saints-Martyrs-Canadiens parishioners, for their part, worried that, given Saint-Jean-Baptiste's "untouchable" heritage status, coupled with the fact that the newer, smaller, well maintained, and unclassed Saints-Martyrs-Canadiens church, meant that their church could be more easily sold to renovate Saint-Jean-Baptiste. A committee formed to try and resist the forced fusion unleashing a fierce, albeit brief, *guerre de clocher*, or "turf war".

During a meeting with the Diocese on April 14, 1999, some 300 frustrated Saint-Martyrs-Canadiens parishioners made it clear that they saw zero advantages for their parish in the marriage and that, from their perspective, the merger had already been decided long ago⁷³¹. Months later, the Diocese confirmed that it did not consult parishioners, nor was it required to, and that December 31, 1999, fusion was "in the common interest"⁷³². Moreover, the authorities tried to reassure parishioners from Saints-Martyrs-Canadiens that it would give Saint-Jean-Baptiste to civil society before selling the more vibrant parish community⁷³³.

The new arrangement eased the financial pressure on Saint-Jean-Baptiste, especially because the Diocese agreed to absorb the church's deficits to assuage parishioners' concerns from the former parish of Saints-Martyrs-Canadiens. One of the first acts of the newly constituted parish was to sell Saint-Jean-Baptiste's rectory, which rented space to community groups and in-so-doing had been running a deficit for years. This decision eased tensions between the two communities but fractured the close relationship between some of the local community service organisations and

⁷³¹ See Pierre Lacouline, « L'avenir de ma paroisse », *Le Soleil*, May 14, 1999, p. B6

⁷³² *Ibid.*

⁷³³ See Marie Caouette, « Sts-Martyrs-Canadiens : Fusions imposées des paroisses », *Le Soleil*, October 6, 1999, p. A6.

the Parish. Coordinator of the People's Committee of Saint-Jean-Baptiste⁷³⁴, Jean-Denis Marois, rejected the Parish's authority over the building: "Either the cops or the bailiffs! There is no way we will leave 'our' rectory"⁷³⁵. Marois said that his group would purchase the rectory for \$1 given that it required renovations, but the parish priest, Abbé Paul Lortie, rejected the idea outright. Later that year the rectory was sold to a not for profit, which operated a homeless shelter and offered space for community groups. Following the forced fusion, harmony once again installed itself as finances had stabilised and Saint-Jean-Baptiste was granted \$1 million in 2000 from the Quebec government to reinforce its steeple, replace its roof, and improve its masonry.^{736, 737}

Four years into their union, tensions between the Parish's two congregations had been once again steadily building and their divergent responses to the release of a study on Saint-Jean-Baptiste's prospects demonstrated how differently the churchwardens of each congregation viewed the elder church's future. The report concluded that a number of reversible transformations could make the church attractive to new owners or managers on the condition that the property maintains its religious, tax-exempt status⁷³⁸. It offered design suggestions, such as creating space for cultural activities on the ground level, a café on the parvis, offices and community space in the basement and a row of small shops along Saint-Jean Street facing onto the sidewalk. The plan stipulated that a small chapel should be arranged, and that Sunday Mass could still be given. Estimated costs for

⁷³⁴ *Comité populaire de Saint-Jean-Baptiste*

⁷³⁵ See Alain Bouchard, « Guerre de clocher autour du presbytère », *Le Soleil*, March 10, 2000, p. A1, original : « Soit les flics, soit les huissiers! Il n'est pas question que nous sortions de 'notre' presbytère ».

⁷³⁶ See Marie Caouette, « Québec verse 3,5 millions \$ pour les églises patrimoniales », *Le Soleil*, July 6, 2000, p. A5.

⁷³⁷ See « Rapport Annuel: 2002-2003 », Fondation du patrimoine religieux du Québec », 2003, p. 25, (web), consulted August 8, 2022, file:///C:/Users/rlux0/Downloads/2002_2003_FPRO_Rapport_annuel2.pdf.

⁷³⁸ See François Vachon, « L'église Saint-Jean-Baptiste est à vendre », *Le Soleil*, September 2, 2004, p. A3.

the proposal ranged between \$700,000 to \$1.4 million, on top of the \$5 million already spent on repairs since 1995⁷³⁹.

Parish Council President Michel Auclair, of Saints-Martyrs-Canadiens, along with the Diocese, interpreted the report as a “green light” to wash their hands of the church. He insisted that “[o]ur primary function is not to do maintenance but to spread the Gospel”.⁷⁴⁰ Another churchwarden, Antoinette Joncas -representing Saint-Jean-Baptiste – interpreted the report differently. Dampening her homologue’s enthusiasm, speaking to journalists, she emphasised that the Parish Council would remain the owners of the Church and that it would remain open for worship, highlighting the fact that neither the City nor the Ministry of Culture had approved the scheme.

The development had the effect of galvanising some parishioners’ determination to save their church and used the report’s release to express their frustration with the forced union. Ginette Auclair complained that, yet another decision was being made without any consultation⁷⁴¹. Her comments make it clear that she fully expected Saints-Martyrs-Canadiens to close instead of her church and described the climate reigning within the fused parish as an “ineffective cohabitation and concertation between parish bodies; a chasm has opened up”⁷⁴². Auclair questioned why the Parish would bother spending \$100,000 on an elevator for Saints-Martyrs-Canadiens given that it would be easier to sell for a considerable profit, unlike Saint-Jean-Baptiste. President of the Saint-Jean-Baptiste Heritage Committee⁷⁴³ Carole Jacques-Savaria vowed the church would remain a

⁷³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁷⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, original: « Notre fonction première, ce n'est pas de faire l'entretien, mais de répandre l'Évangile ».

⁷⁴¹ See Ginette Auclair, « Avenir incertain pour l'église Saint-Jean-Baptiste », *Le Soleil*, September 27, 2004, p. A18.

⁷⁴² *Ibid.* original : « cohabitation and concertation inefficace entre les organismes paroissiaux; un fossé s'est creusé ».

⁷⁴³ *Comité du patrimoine Saint-Jean-Baptiste.*

place of worship, not merely to access grants and subsidies but because “an empty carcass is worthless”⁷⁴⁴.

By December 2004 it was clear that an easy resolution for Saint-Jean-Baptiste was overly optimistic and that the building would not be changing hands anytime soon. In response, the Diocese created a committee – which included the Parish Council, the Saint-Jean-Baptiste Heritage Committee, and the Saint-Jean-Baptiste Neighbourhood Council – and gave it a two-year deadline to develop a plan to increase revenues. Cardinal Marc Ouellet promised to cover the church’s deficits until 2007 (\$100,000) but indicated that the congregation should not expect anything more. “The Church has single-handedly carried these buildings for years and we are still doing it. It’s not fair that we do it alone, while the City benefits from the tourists who come to see Saint-Jean-Baptiste”⁷⁴⁵. Even though the cardinal undoubtedly felt like his Church was alone in shouldering Quebec City’s daunting religious heritage burden, the Quebec State had been increasing its funding within the domain since the 1990s and Quebec City was recognised as a national leader in religious heritage planning by the Quebec government, who exported its approach to other cities. Moreover, since 1998 and 2003, the two levels of government had invested some \$4 million in Saint-Jean-Baptiste’s restoration⁷⁴⁶.

⁷⁴⁴ See Pierre-André Normandin, « Deux ans pour sauver l’église », *Le Soleil*, December 20, 2004, p. A6, original: « Une carcasse vide ne vaut plus rien ».

⁷⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, original: « C’est seulement l’Église qui a porté à bout de bras ces bâtiments pendant des années et on le fait encore. C’est injuste qu’on le fasse seuls, alors que la Ville profite des retombées des touristes qui viennent voir l’église Saint-Jean-Baptiste ».

⁷⁴⁶ See Pierre-André Normandin, « Deux ans pour sauver l’église », *Le Soleil*, December 20, 2004, p. A6.

3. *Policy Developments: 2005-2006, a National Commission on Religious Heritage*

As the Quebec government and Quebec City grew closer in their work on religious heritage in the national capital, the Diocese became noticeably chafed by their increasingly constrained room to manoeuvre. The national consultation on religious heritage held between 2005 and 2006 left no doubt that the days were over when the Church could unilaterally sell and demolish historic downtown churches to make way for condos, as it had done only months earlier with Notre-Dame-du-Chemin as well as Notre-Dame-de-la-Paix and St. Patrick's in recent years⁷⁴⁷. The adversarial dynamic opposing the Church and State on issues like heritage regulation and investments in conservation emerging during this period continued to dominate religious heritage relations in Quebec City but also took hold on a national scale as the rest of Quebec adopted the model established in the capital. A journalist covering the commission observed that "[w]hile the church authorities and parish councils clung to their legal rights and privileges. Civil society, with the cities in the lead, called for a real revolution in the name of protecting this religious heritage"⁷⁴⁸. The commission's timing was providential because of the wealth of briefs directly dealing with the case of Saint-Jean-Baptiste. These include submissions from the Parish Assembly, the Diocese, the local neighbourhood council, the City, and the National Capital Association⁷⁴⁹.

a) *Parish Assembly Brief*

⁷⁴⁷ See Louis-Guy Lemieux, « Les églises de Québec », *Le Soleil*, March 11, 2002, p. A9.

⁷⁴⁸ See Louis-Guy Lemieux, « Patrimoine religieux bâti : Église et Villes s'affrontent », *Le Soleil*, November 3, 2005, p. A7, original: « Pendant que les autorités de l'Église et les conseils de fabrique s'accrochent à leurs droits juridiques et à leurs privilèges, la société civile, les Villes en tête réclament une véritable révolution au nom de la protection de ce patrimoine religieux ».

⁷⁴⁹ Because of the similarity of the NCC submission to that of the City, it will not be explored here.

The Parish Assembly's⁷⁵⁰ position was very clear; there was no way its small membership could continue maintaining a national historic monument indefinitely. It resumed the problems facing the parish as threefold. First, the Parish had been running an annual deficit of \$100,000 for years. Second, even with subsidies, parishes must cover 30 per cent of a project's cost, which to finish renovating Saint-Jean-Baptiste required \$900,000 in parish funds⁷⁵¹. Third, it seemed impossible to find adequate funding to undertake work that would allow revenue-generating activities such as new washrooms, kitchen and multifunctional spaces. Despite these obstacles, the Parish Assembly was careful to mention that it had continued trying to raise funds. In an attempt to solve the operational deficit, the Parish tried to create a group which would pledge \$25 a week for five years called the "4,000 club". Another strategy involved canvassing local businesses. After sending out 76 appeals, the brief notes that they received almost as many refusals⁷⁵².

To explain their position on the church, the Parish Assembly distinguished between the religious and heritage aspects of important religious heritage sites:

A church classified as a historical monument remains, of course, a building with a religious vocation. But its interest for the whole of society is then affirmed on the basis of criteria other than that of faith. It then becomes a heritage asset for the whole of Quebec society⁷⁵³.

The Parish Assembly underscored that the same people who express rage over potential closure are never there when it comes time to contribute. Finally, the brief recommended that a partnership

⁷⁵⁰ A parish assembly is akin to a town hall meeting or working group whereas the parish council would be the executive level of parish governance.

⁷⁵¹ See « Résumé du mémoire soumis par l'Assemblée de fabrique de la paroisse Saint-Jean-Baptiste », Saint-Jean-Baptiste Parish Assembly, August 30, 2005, p. 3, (web), consulted August 12, 2022, <http://www.assnat.qc.ca/en/travaux-parlementaires/commissions/CC/mandats/Mandat-3163/memoires-deposes.html>.

⁷⁵² *Idem.*, p. 4.

⁷⁵³ *Idem.* p. 6, original: « Une église classée monument historique reste, certes, un bâtiment à vocation religieuse. Mais son intérêt pour l'ensemble de la société est alors affirmé à partir d'autres critères que celui de la foi. Elle devient alors une richesse patrimoniale pour l'ensemble de la société québécoise ».

of the City and the Quebec State pledge to take full responsibility for restoration and operating costs for historic monument designated sites and to develop policies regarding how to maximise their cultural utility.

b) Diocese Brief

The Diocese of Quebec's submission was consistent with that of the Parish Assembly's in that it categorically stated that the *status quo* was no longer tenable for massive historic churches, and particularly so for those designated national historic sites, which restrict significant revenue-generating transformations. Presented by the Diocese of Quebec Religious Heritage Committee, the Church emphasised the central role of parishes in the decision-making process of when to close a church and what should become of it – given that they are churches' private proprietors. Although the Diocese confirmed its interest in the creation of a fiduciary entity, it was on the condition that its role be to support heritage-designated churches still used for worship as well as to take over financial and legal responsibility for deconsecrated churches. In this way the Church would retain ownership of some of the most valuable sites, free itself from churches in chronic deficit, and secure stable and predictable operation funding for its remaining historic churches. Although it may seem like triple dipping, the committee explained, "we are convinced that it is with the recognition and active participation of parishioners committed to their Christian communities and supported by the communities in which they are embedded, that the sustainability of the religious heritage is best assured"⁷⁵⁴. From a more practical perspective, the Diocese likewise recommended

⁷⁵⁴ See Comité diocésain du Patrimoine religieux, « Résumé : Mémoire du Comité diocésain du patrimoine religieux de l'Église catholique de Québec », Diocese of Quebec, September 2005, p. 8, (web), consulted August 12, 2022, <http://www.assnat.qc.ca/en/travaux-parlementaires/commissions/CC/mandats/Mandat-3163/memoires-deposes.html>. original: « nous sommes convaincus que c'est avec la reconnaissance et la participation active des paroissiennes et paroissiens engagés dans leurs communautés chrétiennes et appuyés par les collectivités où elles sont insérées, que la pérennité du patrimoine religieux est le mieux assurée ».

that Hydro-Québec establish a discounted energy price for places of worship, and that not-for-profit church buyers retain tax-exempt status. Lastly, both the Parish Assembly and the Diocese insisted that, from their perspective, Quebec's most important religious heritage are Catholic values. The Diocese submitted that Quebecers' preoccupation with their religious heritage demonstrates deeper concerns than architectural conservation.

It reveals that the spiritual and religious dimension of the human being is an essential component in the lives of individuals and communities. This heritage participates and acts actively in hearts and minds. It contributes to building faith, charity, and hope⁷⁵⁵.

c) *City Brief*

Though the City shared the understanding with the Church that religious heritage deserved careful consideration, its brief made it clear that its interest was anything but religious. In contrast to how it viewed the Diocese's sense of religious heritage as "a treasure to promote and use for the new evangelisation"⁷⁵⁶, Quebec's municipal government conceived of religious heritage,

as a cultural and community heritage from its past where religion, it is true, held a special place. It is a question of reminding these partners that we are interested in the same 'material' but that we consider it and must consider it in a completely different way⁷⁵⁷.

⁷⁵⁵ *Idem.* p. 21, original: « Nous sommes tous à l'aube d'une prise de conscience un héritage riche et précieux pour les générations actuelles et futures. Il révèle que la dimension spirituelle et religieuse de l'être humain est une composante essentielle à la vie des personnes et des collectives. Ce patrimoine participe et agit activement dans les cœurs et les esprits. Il contribue à construire la foi, la charité et l'espérance ».

⁷⁵⁶ See Robert Caron, « Mémoire déposé par la Ville de Québec », Commission de la culture, September 2005, p. 6, (web), consulted August 12, 2022, <http://www.assnat.qc.ca/en/travaux-parlementaires/commissions/CC/mandats/Mandat-3163/memoires-deposes.html>, original : « un trésor à faire connaître et à utiliser pour la nouvelle évangélisation ».

⁷⁵⁷ *Idem.*, p.7, original: « comme un héritage culturel et communautaire issu de son passé où la religion, il est vrai, tenait une place de choix. Il s'agit pour nous de rappeler à ces partenaires que nous intéressons à la même 'matière' mais que nous la considérons et devons la considérer d'un tout autre œil ».

Indeed, the City did not pull any punches in deference to the Diocese. It complained that the religious heritage funding structure, limited to operating churches, privileged subsidising religious practice as opposed to preserving buildings according to their architectural and historical merit. In a similar vein, the City questioned the Church's actual commitment to existing heritage policies, citing the case of Saint-Jean-Baptiste as an example. In spite of the 1999 Joint Declaration on religious heritage, which mandated the Diocese continue to offer religious practice in designated heritage churches, the City noted the local Parish, guided by financial and demographic considerations, would probably close the older and more remarkable site⁷⁵⁸. Finally, the City urged the Quebec government to revise the Parish Law, which governs parishes civil responsibilities and privileges. The law endows four to six churchwardens with the power to close and sell parishes, but as the City explained, these officials are often elected by a very small group of parishioners – often as few as a couple dozen – which disenfranchises the vast majority, who perceive churches as belonging to the common good⁷⁵⁹. By involving citizens more vigorously, the City also anticipated greater engagement with restoration and transformation projects.

With respect to the State, the City was equally bristly. Its brief noted that while the Diocese was failing to live up to its end of the bargain by continuing to offer religious services at Saint-Jean-Baptiste and Saint-Charles-de-Limoilou, the Ministry of Culture had likewise stepped back from its pledge to financially support the cost of maintaining the city's heritage churches⁷⁶⁰.

Quebec City's brief's main argument was that the only way to preserve the nation's most significant religious heritage was for the State to assume a central role by using its legal and fiscal weight to create judicial and financial mechanisms guided by a coherent conservation strategy on

⁷⁵⁸ *Idem.*, p. 8.

⁷⁵⁹ *Idem.* p. 14.

⁷⁶⁰ *Idem.*, p. 9.

both national and local scales. Quebec City saw its own role as more of a stakeholder with influence in debate and planning, but not as proprietor of major religious heritage⁷⁶¹. Instead, it joins the Church in calling for the creation of a fiduciary, arguing that

[I]t goes without saying that the State will be solicited, and probably the only one solicited, in order to provide a significant endowment to relieve the parishes and also the religious communities in the process of disposing of certain significant heritage buildings. The establishment of this fund would also give the administrators and the community time to find a new vocation for these properties⁷⁶².

Though the City focused mostly on their vision for the Quebec State's involvement, given the context of the consultations, it also insisted that there was an important role for the federal government to play in funding the potential fiduciary.

d) *Community Council Brief*

Lastly, the brief submitted by the Saint-Jean-Baptiste Neighbourhood Council proceeded in much the same spirit as the City's in terms of the creation of a fiduciary, the revision of the Parish Law, and the importance of consultation. The Council emphasised that heritage interventions should consider "not only the conservation of the container, but also the content and the traditions to which these temples refer" by ensuring multifunctionality, blending community, culture and religious practice⁷⁶³. This suggests that religious considerations have more significance and anti-religiosity is less present at the hyper-local level, where personal, family and neighbourhood identities find poignant expression in churches as sacred spaces, even if they principally serve

⁷⁶¹ *Idem.*, p. 3.

⁷⁶² *Idem.*, p. 16.

⁷⁶³ « Mémoire sur l'avenir du patrimoine religieux », Conseil de Quartier Saint-Jean-Baptiste, September 14, 2005, p. 1, original: « *en considérant non seulement la conservation du contenant, mais aussi du contenu et des traditions auxquelles ces temples font référence* ».

other functions. Another novel contribution by the Council was its warning around the concept of “common good”. Without clearly defining which collectivity is the moral heir to Quebec’s churches, the Neighbourhood Council warned that

it would be regrettable, in the absence of details, if a pressure group could appropriate, in the name of collective well-being, even under the guise of good intentions, a heritage asset to serve its projects⁷⁶⁴.

As would be expected, the Council emphasised the importance of soliciting community engagement throughout the transformation process and the value of consulting residents who, through their conservation work, had been developing local expertise for years.

e) Conclusions

When the general consultations wrapped up after holding sessions right across Quebec, the commission succeeded in convincing the Ministry of Culture to approve four mandates for future heritage intervention by the State. They were 1), to promote knowledge and identification with religious heritage; 2), to increase protection for religious heritage, most notably via a two-year moratorium on church closures (never imposed), imposition of waiting periods before sale and transformation, and to allow government, not-for-profit sectors, and other religions first choice (approved); 3), transmission of religious heritage through the creation of an arm’s-length State organisation with stable funding (led to the transformation of the private Heritage Foundation into the para-public Religious Heritage Council; and 4), management of religious heritage, or an outline

⁷⁶⁴ *Idem.* p. 2, original: « il serait regrettable, faute de précisions, qu'un groupe de pression puisse s'appropriier au nom du bien-être collectif, même sous le couvert de bonnes intentions, d'un bien patrimonial pour servir ses projets ».

of who is responsible and for what (never fully realised).⁷⁶⁵ One way of reading these results is that the Commission essentially recommended extending the heritage apparatus developed by Quebec City during the past decade to the rest of the province. In so doing, smaller centres undoubtedly benefited from the capital's experience, but it left Quebec City no further ahead with respect to enforcing its existing Joint Declaration or how to proceed with a permanent solution for Saint-Jean-Baptiste.

4. *Death Rattle: 2007-2015*

Curiously, despite the fact that Saint-Jean-Baptiste's dilemma had been presented on the national stage and that the Ministry of Culture, if not the government, had largely endorsed the policy proposals its plight had generated, the discourse on its future virtually vanished from public discourse following the commission. In fact, six years would pass before the non-practising public would hear anything more about Saint-Jean-Baptiste's existential struggle in the press.

Behind the scenes, however, influential actors from the business and heritage communities joined ranks with the Parish in 2010 to develop sustainable revenue streams. After two years, the group's project was unveiled in the Spring issue of the local newsletter published by the Saint-Jean-Baptiste's People's Committee, where residents learned about a tangible project to save their church. Abbé Pierre Gingras announced the formation of new corporation, baptised Ekklesia, which would operate a multifunctional space situated in the church nave with a capacity of 500 people⁷⁶⁶. Meanwhile, enough pews would remain at the front of the church to accommodate 300 people for religious practice, which would be divided from the rental space by a large curtain.

⁷⁶⁵ See Quebec, National Assembly,, « Croire au patrimoine religieux du Québec », Ministère de la Culture et des Communications, 2006, (web), consulted February 28, 2025, p. 61-64, https://bibliotheque.cecile-rouleau.gouv.qc.ca/documents/archives/pgq/A11A8_C76_2006.pdf.

⁷⁶⁶ See Agathe Légaré, « Un projet pour sauver l'église Saint-Jean-Baptiste », *L'infobourg*, 24(2), Printemps 2012, p. 1-2.

Ekklesia executive members explained the decision was to attract money from outside the neighbourhood because there was none to be had locally⁷⁶⁷. Though the committee managed to convince the City and the Ministry of Culture to each contribute \$15,000 to study the project's feasibility⁷⁶⁸, Ekklesia would not bear fruit due to heritage restrictions on alterations to the top-rated heritage interior decoration⁷⁶⁹. Thus, barring a remarkable mobilisation of the milieu, Ekklesia would be unable to amass the parish's 20 per cent⁷⁷⁰ of the \$10 million⁷⁷¹ remaining in renovations⁷⁷², never mind the more immediate need to staunch the parish's chronic annual operational deficit, ranging between \$68,000 and \$205,000 between 2008 and 2011⁷⁷³.

The situation did not improve by the autumn of 2014 when the president of the parish Heritage Committee announced that the parish would be launching yet another significant fundraising campaign early the next spring⁷⁷⁴. The new year's disappointing tithing led Abbé Gingras to draw a line in the sand.

250 people come to Mass on Sundays, about 30 on weekdays. We won't start picking people's left pockets when they enter the church and their right pockets when they leave. Out of 25,000 envelopes sent out for the tithe, only 1,000 are returned. That's not going to get us very far⁷⁷⁵.

⁷⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁷⁶⁸ See « Un projet de salle multifonctionnelle à l'église Saint-Jean-Baptiste », *Société Radio-Canada*, January 30, 2012, (web), consulted August 14, 2022, <https://ici.radio-canada.ca/nouvelle/548021/eglise-salle-etude>.

⁷⁶⁹ See Pierre Fraser, « Requiem pour un église », *Photo-Société*, 2017, (web), consulted, August 25, 2022, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iOR_NTRI2cg&ab_channel=PhotoSoci%C3%A9t%C3%A9.

⁷⁷⁰ A figure always in flux but originally established at 30 per cent in 2005 and since the parish portion has been trending downwards.

⁷⁷¹ See Agathe Légaré, « Un projet pour sauver l'église Saint-Jean-Baptiste », *L'infobourg*, 24(2), Printemps 2012, p. 1-2.

⁷⁷² The Religious Heritage Council now supports at least 80 per cent of capital costs.

⁷⁷³ See Philippe Chagnon, « Annexe 1 : Diapositives de la présentation de M. Philippe Chagnon, marguillier », Assemblée de paroissiens et paroissiennes, February 18, 2015, p. 13.

⁷⁷⁴ See Patricia Cloutier, « 10 millions \$ pour restaurer l'église Saint-Jean-Baptiste », *Le Soleil*, November 20, 2014, p.17.

⁷⁷⁵ See Normand Provencher, « L'abbé prie le gouvernement d'intervenir », *Le Soleil*, February 2, 2015, p. 15.

Without immediate government intervention, Abbé Gingras warned he had no other option but to close the church.

C. Shock Treatment 2015: reactions to a charlatan cure.

Even if Abbé Gingras denied in some media reports that the precipitous decision to close the iconic Saint-Jean-Baptiste was intended to “provoke” governments into action, he conceded that he hoped the news would shock secular society to finally assume its responsibility for its heritage. Abbé Gingras reasoned, “[I]f this generates reactions from the government or the municipality, we'll see, but for us, it's really about saying we're no longer capable, we're closing”⁷⁷⁶. When Auxiliary Bishop Mgr. Gaétan Proulx described the closure as a “cry for help”, Abbé Gingras chimed in, “it’s been a long time we’ve been crying”⁷⁷⁷. The decision to close was unanimous when the Parish Council voted on February 16, 2015, and required only the perfunctory approval of the Archdiocese to come into force; the date chosen to celebrate Saint-Jean-Baptiste’s last Mass was May 24, 2015, the Feast of the Pentecost⁷⁷⁸. Two days following the Parish Council meeting, churchwardens presented the decision to roughly 50 people at a parish assembly, which Abbé Gingras reflected to journalists in attendance, “isn’t very many when you think of the whining it will cause”⁷⁷⁹. The priest retained hope, though, that, despite limited attendance and generalised apathy towards the church, announcing the once-unthinkable-closure would awaken

⁷⁷⁶ See Sophie Côté, « L’église Saint-Jean-Baptiste fermera ses portes », *Le Journal de Québec*, February 19, 2015, (web), consulted August 27, 2022, <https://www.journaldeQuebec.com/2015/02/19/leglise-saint-jean-baptiste-fermera-ses-portes>, original: « Si ça génère des réactions au gouvernement ou au municipal, on verra, mais nous, c’est vraiment de dire, on n’est plus capable, on ferme ».

⁷⁷⁷ See Camille B. Vincent, « La Ville refuse de jeter l’éponge », *Le Soleil*, February 21, 2015, p. 12, original: « Aux yeux de l’évêque Gaétan Proulx, cette annonce de fermeture est un ‘cri d’alarme’ lancé par la paroisse pour réveiller les alentours’. Ce à quoi Pierre Gingras, plutôt défaitiste, répond : ‘ça fait longtemps qu’on crie’ ».

⁷⁷⁸ « Extrait du procès-verbal de la 599^e réunion de l’Assemblée de fabrique », Saint-Jean-Baptiste Parish Assembly, Rectory Conference Room, February 16, 2015.

⁷⁷⁹ See Philippe Vaillancourt, « L’église Saint-Jean-Baptiste de Québec fermera le 24 mai », *Presence-info*, February 19, 2015, (web), consulted August 27, 2022, <https://www.cath.ch/newsf/Québec-leglise-saint-jean-baptiste-fermera-ses-portes-le-24-mai/>, original: « c’est peu, quand on pense au chialage que ça va faire ».

Quebec society to what it risks by abandoning its religious heritage. Without greater intervention by the State and Civil Society, Abbé Gingras warned that,

[w]e are in the process of liquidating our history little by little. In little pieces. We are discarding what has made us who we are and what has been our life since the beginning of our colony. We are tearing off the bark, we are tearing off the branches, and we are watering the roots with bleach⁷⁸⁰.

Abbé Gingras was right and wrong. He was right that the definitive announcement of closure would provoke a backlash among non-practising Catholics, and, to a lesser extent, that the news would make stakeholders more conscious of the need for investments from outside of the religious community. He was wrong that it would do much to press governments into accepting the urgency of taking action on, and ultimately responsibility for, Saint-Jean-Baptiste.

1. *Announcement and Initial Reaction: February 2015*

At the press conference held at the church on February 20, Abbé Gingras did not sugar coat his words and made it perfectly clear who he blamed for Saint-Jean-Baptiste's closure: non-practising Catholics and governments, whom he criticised for depending on the city's dwindling practising population. "We [as Quebeckers] are not proud of our history. We have done everything to suppress everything that was religious. And there is no recognition of what has been done and what has been built"⁷⁸¹. As predicted, reactions came from multiple domains: the parish, municipal and Quebec governments, as well as grassroots and institutional civil society.

⁷⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, original: « On est en train de liquider notre histoire peu à peu. Par petits morceaux. On fait un trait sur ce qui nous a bâtis, sur ce qui a été notre vie depuis le début de notre colonie. On arrache l'écorce, on arrache les branches, et on arrose les racines avec l'eau de Javel ».

⁷⁸¹ « L'église Saint-Jean-Baptiste contrainte de fermer », *Ici-Radio-Canada*, February 20, 2015, (web) consulted September 12, 2022, <https://ici.radio-canada.ca/nouvelle/707850/eglise-st-jean-baptiste-fermeture-deficit-Québec>, original: « On n'est fiers de notre histoire. On a un peu tout fait pour tasser tout ce qui était religieux. Et il n'y a pas de reconnaissance pour ce qui a été fait et a été bâti ».

2. *Parishioners' and Clergy's Reactions:*

As noted above, the decision to close was unanimously supported by all churchwardens. Parish Council secretary Jean-François Nadeau explained to the press that for years they have been open to any and all proposals to support the building's maintenance, but that nothing has worked out. "We've been fighting for 15 years. But this time, the numbers have won the battle"⁷⁸². Of more pressing concern for parishioners' pastoral work was the immense community space in the church basement – a rare commodity in a densely built and poor neighbourhood. Deacon Pierre Lefebvre, who celebrated the Mass following the announcement, spoke to parishioners about the urgent need to find a new home for the Saint Vincent de Paul Society, which fed 200 residents a week in 2015. He was also concerned that "the rescue operation that has been started must also allow religious services to continue to be offered"⁷⁸³. Lefebvre's opinion was echoed in a letter to the editor from the Saint Vincent de Paul Society president, Pierre Morissette, who likewise supported keeping a religious vocation as the best possible outcome. He called for the Parish, Diocese, City, and Quebec government to pledge to absorb the annual deficit and for the Religious Heritage Council to pay for capital expenses as a way to maintain the status quo as opposed to a major reconfiguration of the building's vocation⁷⁸⁴. Ruth Parisé, who ran a service which allowed people to buy discounted items donated by local entrepreneurs in concert with the Saint Vincent de Paul Society, co-authored a petition signed by 290 residents shared the community-oriented view. The petition argued that "the last word belongs to the entire population of Faubourg Saint-Jean-Baptiste

⁷⁸² See Jean-François Neron, « En quête d'une solution miracle », *Le Soleil*, February 23, 2015, p. 8, original: « Ça fait 15 ans qu'on se bat. Mais cette fois, les chiffres ont remporté la bataille ».

⁷⁸³ *Ibid.*, original: « l'entreprise de sauvetage amorcée doit aussi permettre de continuer à offrir des services religieux ».

⁷⁸⁴ See Pierre Morissette, « Église à conserver », *Le Soleil*, March 2, 2015, p. 17.

and to all Quebecers. It is up to us to decide the fate of this monument. The clergy has no power to decide on its fate”⁷⁸⁵.

The news prompted many with lapsed practice, for whom the news came as a shock, to attend Mass that February Sunday of 2015. Dozens sent letters and e-mails to Abbé Gingras expressing their incredulity in regard to the church closure as well as suggestions to prevent it. For example, Claudine Gosselin wanted to know if there was a petition she could sign, an official she could lobby, or a protest she could attend. Chantal Fournier wondered if the priest had made a call out for donations to the wider Quebec City population. Guy Boivin suggested operating a consignment store in the basement. Christian Rochefort proposed looking to the federal government. All of the correspondences, kept in the parish archives, expressed sincere grief⁷⁸⁶.

But even Paul Beaulé, who attended Mass each week, was in disbelief that it had actually come to discussing closure. Beaulé, who spent his whole life in the neighbourhood, said the closure is difficult to understand: “It's not just removing a church. It's the whole heritage that's behind it. When a church is closed because there is no one there anymore, I can understand. But there are still people who go there”⁷⁸⁷. Catherine Daigle, likewise a devout Catholic, attended the first Mass following the announcement and brought 150 youth with her from *Montée des Ados de l'Église catholique de Québec*, a high school-aged youth group organisation. They held a minute of silence to show their support for the parishioners of Saint-Jean-Baptiste⁷⁸⁸.

⁷⁸⁵ See Ruth Parisé, « Pétition A/S: Abbé Monsieur Pierre Gingras, curé Saints-Martyrs-Canadiens », May 20, 2015, original: « le dernier mot appartient à toute la population du Faubourg Saint-Jean-Baptiste ainsi qu'à tous les Québécois. C'est à nous de décider du sort de ce monument. Le clergé n'a aucun pouvoir décisionnel sur son sort ».

⁷⁸⁶ All correspondence were retrieved from the Parish archives in July 2020 while conducting field work.

⁷⁸⁷ See Jean-François Neron, « Des paroissiens attristés », *Le Soleil*, February 23, 2015, p. 8, original: « Ce n'est pas juste d'enlever une église. C'est tout le patrimoine qui est derrière ça. Quand une église est fermée parce qu'il n'y a plus personne, je peux comprendre. Mais il y a encore des gens qui la fréquentent ».

⁷⁸⁸ See Elisa Cloutier, « Plus de 150 jeunes plaident pour sa survie », *Le journal de Québec*, February 23, 2015, p. 9.

Before the final Mass, the Parish hosted an innovative event, held on April 28 & 29, 2015, where parishioners were invited to meet with clergy and churchwardens in the basement to participate in an innovative closure ritual. To open, participants filed upstairs into the church to listen to a gospel reading. When they returned to the basement, they were asked to share their memories, feelings about the closure, and what they will give thanks for during the last Mass. The proceedings were filmed and documented by sociologist Pierre Fraser in what he believed was a first for a church closure in Quebec or Canada⁷⁸⁹.

Parishioners shared memories for the closure ritual along six axes. They remembered 1), individuals, whether a strict priest in the confessional or the old people who never missed a Mass even in their nineties and during blizzards; 2), they recalled taking their sacraments and those of their families; 3), organisations like scouts and the choir came to mind; 4), many people commented on the nature of the community, which cuts across class and social lines, and its welcoming nature; 5), others reflected on the building's beauty, its nature as an instrument referring to organ within and outside the walls, its carillon, and how it was where they cultivated their faith; 6), lastly, many people remembered the late-night suppers after midnight Mass, which brought the neighbourhood together to feast⁷⁹⁰. Overall, participants evoked a sense of the church as an almost animate object that had accompanied them throughout their lives.

In relation to how the closure made participants feel, they reported both negative and positive emotions. On the negative side of the ledger, parishioners expressed pain in facing the decline of religion; shock and frustration about the abandonment by governments and the wider public,

⁷⁸⁹ See Jean-François Fortin, « Compte rendu des rencontres des paroissien(ne)s de Saint-Jean-Baptiste tenues les mardi 28 avril 2015 de 19h à 20h15 et mercredi 29 avril 2015 de 14h à 15h30 au sous-sol de l'église Saint-Jean-Baptiste et présidées par M. l'abbé Pierre Gingras, curé », Saint-Jean-Baptiste Parish Assembly, April 30, 2015.

⁷⁹⁰ *Idem.*, pp. 3-5.

incomprehension of how society had changed, loss of collective memory and culture; as well as fear for the future of the neighbourhood. On the positive side, feelings of hope dominated, whether for a timely re-opening of the church, or that the closure might awaken governments to what it risks losing by ignoring important religious heritage. People also hoped that future generations would remember them as having fought to transmit faith rather than to preserve stones. Others expressed a sense of gratitude for the experience, which allowed them to test the steadiness of their faith⁷⁹¹.

For his part Abbé Gingras encouraged those in attendance to move to Saint-Martyrs-Canadiens, several kilometres up the road, following the closure. Promising that rides could be arranged, he insisted that, “distance should not be a barrier to continuing to 'do things together'; it is our church that is dormant, not our community”⁷⁹². To reporters, Abbé Gingras explained that there was no timeline for a conversion and that the Parish could wait years in order to ensure the building was treated properly, however, he cautioned that “if the time takes too long, there is a sign that will appear of a big sale by the owner”⁷⁹³.

3. *Governments' Reactions*

The Church's abdication of responsibility for Saint-Jean-Baptiste demanded a response from the City and the Quebec government. Both levels of government reassured residents that they would work to find a solution but remained vague about what one would look like. In the days following Abbé Gingras' announcement, the City signalled that it would “help” to save the local landmark but made it clear that the resources required to restore and maintain such a massive church were

⁷⁹¹ *Idem.*, pp. 6-7.

⁷⁹² *Idem.*, p. 9, original: « *la distance ne doit pas être un frein à continuer de 'faire ensemble'; c'est notre église qui fait dormance, pas notre communauté* ».

⁷⁹³ See Isabelle Porter, « Églises – Ces géantes en quête de vocation », *Le Devoir*, May 6, 2015, p. A1, original: « *si le temps prend trop de temps, il y a une pancarte qui va apparaître de grande vente du proprio* ».

beyond its means. Mayor Régis Labeaume, a strict secularist politician perhaps more by necessity than conviction, said he would play a liaison role between the Church and the Quebec government and would help to identify possible revenue streams for a future transformation but insisted that “the City is not responsible for churches”⁷⁹⁴. The long-time mayor was clear. He underlined the fact that it was the Ministry of Culture that refused the proposal to transform part of the nave into a banquet hall because of the church’s heritage status, concluding that “when a government decides to designate a heritage building, there is a governmental responsibility to support it. We want to help, but there is no question that we will take responsibility”⁷⁹⁵. Vice president of the city’s executive council, Julie Lemieux, emphasised the importance of keeping the church open in order to assure funding for future restoration work: “my wish is to delay the closure because when a church is said to be in surplus, it no longer has access to grants for religious heritage”⁷⁹⁶.

All the Minister of Culture, Hélène David, had to say was to encourage the Parish to submit a proposal to transform the church and that, like any other church, the Quebec government would cover 80 per cent of costs⁷⁹⁷. On the federal level, candidate and future cabinet minister, Jean-Yves Duclos, offered Ottawa’s support, “We can help”. He said, “This church must be preserved. It is a

⁷⁹⁴ See Taïeb Moalla, « La Ville de Québec veut aider à sauver l’église Saint-Jean-Baptiste », *Le Journal de Québec*, February 21, 2015, p. 22, original: « *La Ville ne s’occupe pas des églises* ».

⁷⁹⁵ See Camille B. Vincent, « La Ville refuse de jeter l’éponge », *Le Soleil*, February 21, 2015, p. 12, original: « *Nous, on va être aidants, mais, quand un gouvernement décide de classer un édifice patrimonial, il y a une responsabilité gouvernementale qui vient avec. On veut aider, mais il n’est pas question qu’on en prenne la responsabilité* ».

⁷⁹⁶ See François Cattapan, « Fermer l’église Saint-Jean-Baptiste compromettrait sa sauvegarde », *Québec Hebdo*, February 22, 2015, (web), no longer available online, accessed from Parish archives, original: « *Mon souhait c’est de retarder la fermeture, car, lorsqu’une église est dite excédentaire, elle n’a plus accès aux subventions pour le patrimoine religieux* ».

⁷⁹⁷ « Québec prêt à soutenir une reconversion de l’église Saint-Jean-Baptiste », *Ici Radio-Canada – Québec*, May 6, 2015, (web), consulted October 26, 2022, <https://ici.radio-canada.ca/nouvelle/719542/eglise-st-jean-baptiste-fermeture-reconversion-patrimoine-religieux>.

duty and a responsibility”⁷⁹⁸. But one crucial element of attracting government assistance was the intervention of local civil society to demonstrate an interest in a church’s conservation, especially with respect to transformations.

4. *Civil Society Reactions:*

In the realm of church conservation, closures and transformations, civil society performs an integral role in applying political pressure on governments and the Church. It also plays a fundamental part in generating community consensus for proposed projects by identifying local expertise and raising funds within the business community and soliciting individual donors. Civil society can be institutional, comprising pre-existing institutions; professionals such as architects, urbanists, art historians, etc.; and research groups like heritage organisations. It can also appear spontaneously, which could mean community associations and/or specifically formed *ad hoc* groups. Both forms were present in the saga that was the closure of Saint-Jean-Baptiste-de-Québec.

a) *Institutional Civil Society*

Immediately following the announcement of the church’s closure, two main institutional groups responded. Architects and architecture students are affiliated with the University of Laval and a stakeholder committee. Architecture professor Jacques Plante was among the first to weigh in days following the February announcement. Plante’s vision was predicated on preserving Saint-Jean-Baptiste’s ornate interior while simultaneously finding a solution to the building’s financing. He recommended relocating the National Archives to the church. Plante argued in a letter to the editor that, compared to the near anonymity of the archives’ current location, the “architectural,

⁷⁹⁸ See Isabelle Porter, « Un candidat libéral veut sauver l’église Saint-Jean-Baptiste », *Le Devoir*, October 6, 2015, (web), consulted October 26, 2022, <https://www.ledevoir.com/politique/ville-de-Québec/451839/Québec-un-candidat-liberal-veut-sauver-l-eglise-saint-jean-baptiste>, original: « On peut aider. Cette église-là doit absolument être préservée. C’est un devoir et une responsabilité ».

photographic and genealogical archives, old maps and other rare documents from our history would be better placed there and certainly closer to citizens and visitors”⁷⁹⁹. This approach, the architect suggested, would allow the neighbourhood and parishioners to maintain contact with the site in a more than less preserved state. Another architecture professor and religious heritage specialist from Laval, Tania Martin, had her students muse on potential new vocations for the imposing structure. She highlighted in a media interview that many of the students expressed an interest in a cohabitation of the church’s former religious vocation and new uses. For Martin, it was important for her students to meet with neighbourhood associations to ensure that their visions were aimed at providing services solicited by residents, noting that not every church can be transformed into a library – something already realised down the street at Saint Matthew’s, formerly an Anglican church. “Each time, we must think in complementarity with what already exists. You can’t undress James to clothe Paul”⁸⁰⁰.

The other institutional response was the creation of a committee made up of the main stakeholders, envisioned as a conduit for dialogue. These included representatives from the City, the Ministry of Culture, the Diocese and the Religious Heritage Council of Quebec. Media reports established that the committee was in no rush to settle on a project. Representatives from both the Diocese and the Council set a time frame of ten years to determine a project and to generate community consensus for it⁸⁰¹.

⁷⁹⁹ See Jacques Plante, « Le phare de Saint-Jean-Baptiste s’éteint », *Le Soleil*, February 24, 2015, p. 25, original: « *Les archives d’architecture, de photographies, de généalogie, les cartes anciennes et autres documents rares de notre histoire y seraient mieux à leur place et très certainement plus à proximité des citoyens et des visiteurs* ».

⁸⁰⁰ See Valérie Gaudreau, « Du centre de jour à la zoothérapie », *Le Soleil*, November 8, 2015, p. 6, original: « *Chaque fois, il faut penser en complémentarité avec ce qui existe déjà. On ne peut pas déshabiller Jacques pour habiller Paul* ».

⁸⁰¹ See Isabelle Porter, « Églises – Ces géantes en quête de vocation », *Le Devoir*, May 6, 2015, p. A1.

b) *Grassroots Civil Society*

Unlike its institutional counterparts, grassroots civil society was not prepared to wait ten years to regain access to one of the neighbourhood's only large community spaces. A local developer wrote to the newspaper suggesting a mobilisation⁸⁰² of local construction entrepreneurs who would volunteer their expertise and labour to restore the historic church. Daniel Vachon, who suggested the community-based solution, so popular in the 19th and 20th centuries, told media that many of his colleagues were interested in this *corvée* approach and that it “could be the spark for a wider mobilisation” for religious heritage⁸⁰³. Another letter writer suggested that to keep the church open to the public, the government should consider transforming Saint-Jean-Baptiste into a pantheon for Quebec's national heroes, like the one in Paris⁸⁰⁴.

The principal grassroots response, however, crystallised around the Citizens Mobilisation Campaign, which organised extensive public consultations just before the last Mass and attracted the support of politicians representing the neighbourhood. The Saint-Jean-Baptiste Neighbourhood Council commissioned a local survey to conduct online consultations and president Louis Dumoulin organised an in-person neighbourhood meeting, attended by ward councillor Anne Guérette and National Assembly representative Agnès Maltais. The latter threw her support behind Mayor Régis Labeaume's and Abbé Gingras' pet project, a school for traditional crafts which could simultaneously restore the church and develop expertise in the traditional arts and crafts necessary for religious heritage restorations across Quebec⁸⁰⁵.

⁸⁰² Based on the *corvée* or chore system, traditionally used to achieve collective works in New France and Québec.

⁸⁰³ See Normand Provencher, « Une ‘corvée’ entrepreneuriale pour sauver l'église Saint-Jean-Baptiste », *Le Soleil*, March 22, 2015, p. 14, original: « *ce serait peut-être la bougie d'allumage pour une mobilisation plus large* ».

⁸⁰⁴ See Robert Trudel, « Panthéon Saint-Jean-Baptiste », *Le Soleil*, July 6, 2016, p. 21.

⁸⁰⁵ See Normand Provencher, « Une campagne citoyenne pour la sauvegarde du bâtiment », *Le Soleil*, May 21, 2015, p. 7.

By the time the consultations concluded in October, 750 people had responded to the online survey, 97 per cent of whom reported a strong attachment to the building and supported giving it a new vocation⁸⁰⁶. Of the respondents, 80 per cent were either non-believers or did not practise religion and the majority sought a transformation in the domain of arts and culture, paid for largely by the Quebec government⁸⁰⁷. In terms of how respondents envisioned their personal roles in a future transformation, 31 per cent responded that they would like to participate and 56 per cent answered that they would be willing to contribute to fundraising campaign. In addition, respondents offered more than 200 suggestions of future uses of Saint-Jean-Baptiste⁸⁰⁸. Commenting on the enthusiastic response to the consultations, neighbourhood council president Louis Dumoulin explained that “the closure was a hard blow to the neighbourhood’s community life. It hit hard. The church was a tool for economic development and tourism. We have to push on this project”⁸⁰⁹.

The day after the results were released, Mayor Labeaume officially announced that the church would be saved by implementing a project proposed by the Saint-Roch-Foundation – an organisation founded to preserve another of the city’s massive churches – to create a school for young artisans to simultaneously repair the church and transmit traditional craftsmanship to future generations⁸¹⁰ (the project alluded to in the spring by MNA Maltais). Dumoulin was critical of the mayor’s certainty. Beyond questions about financing, Dumoulin worried that the trades school project would prevent residents and tourists from accessing the church and would occupy the entire

⁸⁰⁶ See « Trouver une nouvelle vocation pour l’Église Saint-Jean-Baptiste », *Ici Radio-Canada – Québec*, October 1, 2015, (web), consulted October 31, 2022, <https://ici.radio-canada.ca/nouvelle/742051/eglise-saint-jean-baptiste-Québec>.

⁸⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

⁸⁰⁹ See Normand Provencher, « À conserver en entier, avec une vocation artistique », *Le Soleil*, October 1, 2015, p. 16, original: « *La fermeture a été un coup de poignard à la vie communautaire du quartier. Ça frappé dur. L’église est un outil de développement économique et touristique. Il faut taper sur ce clou-là* ».

⁸¹⁰ See Taïeb Moalla, « Église Saint-Jean-Baptiste : le maire affirme qu’elle sera sauvée », *Le Journal de Québec*, October 2, 2015, (web), consulted October 2, 2015, <https://www.journaldeQuebec.com/2015/10/02/eglise-saint-jean-baptiste-le-maire-affirme-quelle-sera-sauvee>.

space, preventing any community vocation. He also pointed to the consultation results, which showed that only 27 per cent of respondents supported a training centre and only 4 per cent thought it would be the best way to use the church⁸¹¹.

In the spring of 2016, the group that had grown up around Dumoulin and the parish heritage committee since 2010⁸¹² formed a not-for-profit corporation called *Espace Solidaire*⁸¹³ which advanced its own project they called *Carrefour de généalogie de l'Amérique francophone*⁸¹⁴, which would house various types of the national archives and function as a research centre for people seeking to learn about their French-Canadian ancestry. The City approved a \$45,000 grant to the group to conduct a feasibility study, with Labeaume suggesting the project could capitalise on growing genealogical and religious tourism trends⁸¹⁵.

So overall, the two dominant ideas that emerged immediately following Saint-Jean-Baptiste's closure were the traditional crafts and trades school, favoured by the City and Abbé Gingras, and the genealogical centre advanced by grassroots civil society, while the Archdiocese and institutional civil society were in no rush to publicly muse on any future vocations. But before going any further, it is essential to return to the Feast of the Pentecost in 2015, May 24, the day Abbé Gingras held the very last Mass at Saint-Jean-Baptiste.

⁸¹¹ See Kathy-Anne Collin, « Église Saint-Jean-Baptiste: optimisme prudent », *L'Exemplaire*, October 25, 2015, (web), consulted October 31, 2022, <https://www.exemplaire.com.ulaval.ca/reportages/eglise-saint-jean-baptiste-optimisme-prudent/>.

⁸¹² See its documents of incorporation for a detailed list of its membership: <http://www.Québecentreprises.com/espace-solidaire-g7kd/>.

⁸¹³ Solidarity Space.

⁸¹⁴ The Crossroads of Francophone American Genealogy.

⁸¹⁵ See Camille Simard, « L'église Saint-Jean-Baptiste pourrait devenir centre de généalogie », *Ici Radio-Canada – Québec*, April 7, 2016, (web), consulted, October 31, 2022, <https://ici.radio-canada.ca/nouvelle/774552/eglise-st-jean-baptiste-convertie-centre-genealogie>.

5. *Last Mass*

More than 2,000 people filled Saint-Jean-Baptiste's pews that Pentecost Sunday to bid farewell to the imposing urban, cultural, social, religious and even political landmark⁸¹⁶. The special closure Mass, though not a desacralisation, involved a series of rituals which involved special blessings and the removal of relics to be transferred to Saints-Martyrs-Canadiens. Before beginning the Pentecost Mass, Abbé Gingras rose before the packed church, and said, "I find people quite extraordinary in their solidarity and in what is a trial for the Christian community. The bells will ring out their joy one last time, and then it will be over, both for life above and below"⁸¹⁷. In his homily, Abbé Gingras delivered an elegy to Saint-Jean-Baptiste church as more than just a beautiful building but rather as a witness to their ancestors: "a witness to their faith, a witness to their life, a witness to their commitment, a witness to the possible encounter with God in the midst of urban life"⁸¹⁸; and as a symbol: "this symbol of a tenacious audacity that comes from our ancestors; this symbol of a collective dynamism that expresses the greatness and dignity of a Nation when it knows how to unite to build..."⁸¹⁹. The priest also issued a warning to the public, which he criticised for being historically myopic and religiously allergic:

"We must remind our people that the moment a society forgets its history, the moment a society despises its history or seeks to rewrite it, that society is putting

⁸¹⁶ See Catherine Bouchard, « La fin d'un 'monument historique' », *Le Journal de Québec*, May 25, 2015, p. 7.

⁸¹⁷ See David Rémillard, « Les portes de l'église Saint-Jean-Baptiste refermées », *Le Soleil*, May 25, 2015, p. 4, original: « *Je trouve les gens tout à fait extraordinaires dans leur solidarité et dans ce qui constitue une épreuve pour la communauté chrétienne. Les cloches vont faire entendre une dernière fois leur joie, après, ce sera terminé, autant pour la vie en haut que la vie en bas* ».

⁸¹⁸ See Pierre Gingras, Pierre, « Homélie de la messe de fermeture au culte de l'église Saint-Jean-Baptiste », May 24, 2015, Saint-Jean-Baptiste Church, Québec City, (web), consulted October 31, 2022, <https://www.ecdq.org/homelie-de-la-messe-de-fermeture-au-culte-de-leglise-saint-jean-baptiste/>, original: « *une église témoin, témoin de leur foi, témoin de leur vie, témoin de leur engagement, témoin de la possible rencontre de Dieu au milieu de la vie urbaine* ».

⁸¹⁹ *Ibid.*, original: « *ce symbole d'une audace tenace qui nous provient de nos ancêtres; ce symbole d'un dynamisme collectif qui traduit la grandeur et la dignité d'une nation quand elle sait s'unir pour bâtir...* ».

its future at risk. And here, history was written with Christ, for Christ and in Christ”⁸²⁰.

Following the Mass, the bells rang out midday for the last time as hundreds gathered on the parvis, filled with emotion. As detailed above, civil society threw itself into imagining new vocations for the church, and while the City and the Quebec governments were not forthcoming in definite announcements, they were working in the background to come up with a long-term solution to the building’s ultimate challenge: financial stability.

D. Religious Heritage Funding Re-examined: 2016-2020

1. *Religious Heritage Conference*

In late September 2016, Quebec City invited more than 200 actors from the heritage realm to contribute to drafting a ten-year Heritage Vision for 2017 to 2027. In presenting its vision for religious heritage – the most substantive element of the conference – the City established a new paradigm for religious heritage funding and responsibility for the entirety of Quebec. Mayor Régis Labeaume took the gathering as an opportunity to announce that his municipal government would be raising its support for religious heritage by \$15 million over ten years⁸²¹. In the same breath, Labeaume challenged the Minister of Culture, who was in attendance, to match the investment, to which Minister Luc Fortin promised to work on. If Fortin agreed, the shared annual expense on the city’s religious heritage would grow from \$3 million to \$6 million annually. In the same presentation, the mayor identified seven of the city’s most valuable heritage churches, which

⁸²⁰ *Ibid.*, original: « Nous devons rappeler aux nôtres qu’au moment où une société oublie son histoire, au moment où une société méprise son histoire ou cherche à la réécrire, cette société met en danger son avenir. Et ici, l’histoire s’est écrite avec le Christ, pour le Christ et dans le Christ ».

⁸²¹ See Valérie Gaudreau, « La Ville alloue 15 M\$ pour restaurer sept églises », *Le Soleil*, September 20, 2016, (web), consulted November 1, 2022, <https://www.lesoleil.com/2016/09/20/la-ville-alloue-15-m-pour-restaurer-sept-eglises-45bb991f1ff0a380720d154412901d08>.

would share the funds: the cathedral-basilica Notre-Dame-de-Québec, Saint-Jean-Baptiste, Saint-Roch, Saint-Sauveur, Saint-Charles-Borromée-de Charlesbourg, la Nativité-de-Notre-Dame and the Anglican cathedral, Holy Trinity – Saint-Charles-de-Limoilou would be added in the adopted plan the following year⁸²².

Cardinal Mgr. Gérald Cyprien Lacroix spoke at the opening of the conference. He emphasised that the perfect storm of declining religious practice, diminished attachment to parish life, expensive ageing buildings, and shrinking revenues meant that the Church has had to make difficult choices. He noted that, over the past 35 years, the Diocese has shuttered 20 Quebec City churches, 11 of which were demolished to make way for condos, leaving the city (post-amalgamation) with 60 active churches and 60 convent complexes⁸²³. In thanking the City for its interest in preserving its religious heritage, the cardinal was careful to distinguish between religious practice and religious heritage.

We understand very well that it is not the responsibility of a city to subsidise places of worship. Moreover, the investments that will be made over the next few years are not intended for pastoral care, evangelisation or catechism, but rather for the safeguarding and enhancement of these places of great historical and patrimonial wealth. We understand very well that this does not open the door to requests for subsidies for other churches that have needs⁸²⁴.

⁸²² See « Vision du patrimoine 2027 : préserver, enrichir, transmettre », Quebec City, 2017, (web), consulted November 1, 2022, https://www.ville.Québec.qc.ca/publications/docs_ville/vision_patrimoine.pdf.

⁸²³ See Mgr. Gérald Cyprien Lacroix, Allocution de Monsieur Gérald Cyprien Lacroix, Archevêque de Québec, Primat du Canada », Séminaire de Québec, September 20, 2016, (web), consulted November 1, 2022, file:///C:/Users/rlux0/Downloads/2016-09-20_allocution_patrimoine-religieux%20cyprien.pdf.

⁸²⁴ *Ibid.*, original: « Nous comprenons très bien qu'il n'est pas du ressort d'une ville de subventionner les lieux de culte. D'ailleurs, les investissements qui seront faits au cours des prochaines années ne sont pas destinés à la pastorale, à l'évangélisation ou à la catéchèse, mais bel et bien à la sauvegarde et à la mise en valeur de ces lieux d'une grande richesse historique et patrimoniale. Nous comprenons très bien que ceci n'ouvre pas la porte à des demandes de subventions pour les autres églises qui ont des besoins. Nous continuerons de chercher les solutions appropriées pour les autres lieux de culte en comprenant que la Ville s'en tiendra au programme qu'elle vient d'annoncer en regard du patrimoine religieux pour les dix prochaines années ».

Quebec and Canada's head Catholic noted that of the eight churches to receive regular municipal financing, some like the cathedral would continue to function as sites of worship, but that others would assume mixed vocations and still others would ideally be transferred entirely to cultural and community vocations. Without saying so, he was referring to the two churches on the list already closed: Saint-Jean-Baptiste and Saint-Charles-de-Limoilou.

Two months following the conference, the Ministry of Culture signalled its support when it released a memo calling on municipalities across Quebec to take more responsibility for the promotion of their religious heritage. He wrote in a letter to Quebec mayors: "I consider that it is the responsibility of cities and municipalities to ensure the protection and enhancement of this heritage of local and regional interest, in the same way that the Ministry takes responsibility for ensuring the protection of heritage of national significance"⁸²⁵. Likewise, Minister Fortin insisted that, before any closure or demolition takes place, to notify his ministry so that the necessary analyses can take place. Finally, in August 2017, the Ministry of Culture announced that it would indeed match the increased municipal funding for religious heritage, creating a separate fund of \$1.5 million in annual funding for the city's eight churches, on top of what it already contributed to the Heritage Council to distribute. Much like Mgr. Lacroix, Minister Fortin, was careful to distinguish religious heritage from religious practice. He explained that, as a society, there is "a duty to remember our religious heritage. We don't have castles like in Europe, but we do have

⁸²⁵ See Valérie Gaudreau, « Sauvegarde du patrimoine : les maires appelés à l'aide », *Le Soleil*, November 21, 2016, (web), consulted November 1, 2022, <https://www.lesoleil.com/2016/11/22/sauvegarde-du-patrimoine-les-maires-appelles-a-laide-11ebb8f9197e0fc709bad640adfe0c5d>, original: « Je considère qu'il est de la responsabilité des villes et des municipalités de veiller à la protection et à la mise en valeur de ce patrimoine d'intérêt local et régional, de la même manière que le Ministère prend la responsabilité d'assurer la protection du patrimoine, qui a une portée nationale ».

churches, and this has significant cultural potential, and tourist potential too. So, we must do our bit”⁸²⁶.

2. *John Porter Committee*

Aside from the new funding commitments, Heritage Vision 2017-2027 called for the creation of a committee to determine funding allocations according to the capital needs of the eight churches. Mayor Labeaume announced in late October 2017 that the former director of the National Art Gallery of Quebec⁸²⁷ and specialist of Quebec’s churches, John Porter, would lead the new committee charged with distributing \$30 million over ten years. Porter told the press at the announcement that

I am here as a representative of heritage partisans. I have been involved in this field for 45 years; I have never refused an invitation from Quebec City or elsewhere in Quebec ... I am here as a volunteer; I have no interest other than serving the heritage of my city⁸²⁸.

The heritage specialist announced his committee’s composition in December. It would include a geographer and urbanist (Serge Filion), an architect (Bernard-Serge Gagné), an art conservationist (Mario Béland), historian and photographer (Pierre Lahoud), a real estate specialist (Claude Tessier), as well as a representative from the City’s architectural and heritage department (Odile

⁸²⁶ See Annie Morin, « De l’argent pour ‘sauver’ des joyaux religieux de Québec », *Le Soleil*, August 8, 2017, (web), consulted November 1, 2022, <https://www.lesoleil.com/2017/08/08/de-largent-pour-sauver-des-joyaux-religieux-de-Québec-22d709a9abda1524c86d2b12ef253592>, original: « un devoir de mémoire à l’égard de notre patrimoine religieux. On n’a pas des châteaux comme en Europe, mais on a des églises et ça a un potentiel culturel important, un potentiel touristique aussi. Alors on se doit de faire notre part ».

⁸²⁷ *Musée national des beaux-arts*.

⁸²⁸ See Jean-Luc Lavallée, « John Porter en renfort », *Le Journal de Québec*, October 21, 2017, p. 20, original: « Je suis ici comme représentant du ‘parti patrimoine’. Je m’investis dans ce domaine-là depuis 45 ans, je n’ai jamais refusé une invitation à Québec ou ailleurs au Québec ... Je suis ici à titre bénévole, je n’ai aucun intérêt, hormis que de servir le patrimoine de ma ville ».

Roy)⁸²⁹. Described by the press as an “all-star committee”⁸³⁰, Porter outlined his vision of how the group of experts would function:

The perspective that will drive us is a vision of the future. The short term is important. But what is even more important is the long term. It's a bit like a sort of cultural business plan that we want to draw up⁸³¹.

While the committee set itself to draw up the plan, the physical condition of Saint-Jean-Baptiste deteriorated and with it the cordiality that had reigned up until this point between the City and the Church. On December 29, 2017, during a cold snap, the church's heating system broke down, the water in the radiator pipes froze, and when the weather thawed, Abbé Gingras found water flowing down the walls and over important artworks, which had to be removed. The priest told the press that the Parish did not have the money to repair the system or clean up the mess the breakdown created⁸³². The next day, Mayor Labeaume expressed his frustration with the Parish publicly for the first time. Not only did he blame the Parish's insistence on abandoning responsibility for the church and placing it on the shoulders of the untested not-for-profit, Solidarity Space, a strategy he qualified as “ridiculous”, for delays in creating the Institute of Traditional Arts and Crafts, but he also characterised the claim that the Parish could not afford to repair the recent damage as a “refusal to shoulder its cross”⁸³³. Labeaume was clear that the new funds were designated for restoring churches, not for general upkeep, which is the responsibility of the Parish.

⁸²⁹ See Annie Morin, « Patrimoine religieux : place à la créativité », *Le Soleil*, December 8, 2017, p. 11.

⁸³⁰ See Stéphanie Martin, « Un comité ‘costaud’ pour réfléchir à l’avenir des églises de Québec », *Le Journal de Québec*, December 7, 2017, (web), consulted November 2, 2022, <https://www.journaldeQuebec.com/2017/12/07/un-comite-costaud-pour-reflechir-a-lavenir-des-eglises>.

⁸³¹ See Annie Morin, « Patrimoine religieux : place à la créativité », *Le Soleil*, December 8, 2017, p. 11, original: « *La perspective qui va nous animer, c'est une vision d'avenir. Le court terme, c'est important. Mais ce qui est encore plus important, c'est le long terme. C'est un peu comme une sorte de plan d'affaires culturel qu'on va vouloir dégager* ».

⁸³² See « Dégâts importants à l'église Saint-Jean-Baptiste », *Ici Radio-Canada – Québec*, February 6, 2018, (web), consulted November 2, 2022, <https://ici.radio-canada.ca/nouvelle/1082397/degats-importants-a-leglise-saint-jean-baptiste>.

⁸³³ See Taïeb Moalla, « La Ville ne paiera pas pour le chauffage, dit le maire Labeaume », *Le Journal de Québec*, February 8, 2018, p. 32, original: « *refus de se faire mettre le signe sur l'épaule* ».

Their first task was to propose a new model to ensure the sustainability of Quebec City's heritage churches. Affirming that the present model of last-minute emergency grants spread across the city's 60 churches was broken, the committee proposed the creation of a fiduciary, composed of the Diocese of Quebec, local parishes, the City, the National Capital Commission and the Ministry of Culture. According to the proposal, the fiduciary would become the proprietor and manager of the eight priority churches and would manage the \$30 million in pledged government funds, which the report railed was nowhere near enough to accomplish reaching sustainability⁸³⁴.

Notably, Porter's report detailed its expectation of the Diocese's participation in the fiduciary. He asked the Diocese to fund its portion of the new structure by contributing a significant portion of the profits generated by future sales of churches without heritage value. Labeaume went even further, accusing the Diocese and its parishes of deliberate neglect of their churches' maintenance, citing Saint-Jean-Baptiste's heating system and the steeple of Saint-Sauveur, which the City eventually had to repair at the cost of \$600,000 to protect public safety: "Personally, I'm getting tired of this whole business! Something will have to happen; there are limits to what the City can do... There will have to be others who will do their bit"⁸³⁵. Openly expressing his exasperation, he continued,

[w]hen we created this fund; we decided that we had a collective responsibility... Everyone has a historical responsibility. I have never decided to build churches in my life. But I am a trustee. Otherwise, who will take care of the heritage? ⁸³⁶.

⁸³⁴ See Véronica Lê-Huu, « Une fiducie pour préserver le patrimoine religieux de Québec », *Ici Radio-Canada – Québec*, June 13, 2018, (web), consulted November 2, 2018, <https://ici.radio-canada.ca/nouvelle/1106794/fiducie-patrimoine-religieux-sauvegarde-eglises-Québec>.

⁸³⁵ *Ibid.*, original: « *Moi, je commence à avoir mon voyage! Il va falloir qu'il se passe quelque chose, il y a des limites à ce que la Ville peut faire ... Il va falloir qu'il y en ait d'autres qui fassent leur bout* ».

⁸³⁶ See Jean-François Neron, « De l'argent, pas seulement des prières », *Le Soleil*, June 14, 2018, p. 1,2,3, original: « *Quand on a créé ce fonds-là, on a décidé qu'on avait une responsabilité collective ... Tout le monde a sa responsabilité historique. Moi, je n'ai jamais pris la décision de construire des églises dans ma vie. Mais je suis fiduciaire. Sinon, qui va s'occuper du patrimoine?* ».

Along with the report, Porter also announced the funding breakdown for 2018, with Saint-Jean-Baptiste receiving the third least of the eight at \$180,000 a year. This amount was added to \$390,000 from the Religious Heritage Council of Quebec, and \$30,000 from the Parish, making \$600,000. In the end, and against the wishes of the City, the money was dedicated to entirely replacing the heating system, which had broken down a number of times leading to water damage, as well as replacing the church's sprinkler system⁸³⁷.

The open conflict over future ownership of the church, either the not-for-profit, the Parish's preference, or the fiduciary, the City's preference, added to the Diocese's unwillingness to participate financially, ground all progress on the church's re-opening to a halt. Two years into his role, Porter openly denounced the Diocese's role in stalling progress on the fiduciary. "I've come out of the last two years a little disillusioned. I've had, I don't know how many meetings, exchanges and so on, but it never led to anything"⁸³⁸. From the Diocese's perspective, the City has not shown the Church its due respect. Vicar General Mario Duchesne explained that "at some point, too many accusations were made against the Church... We have to be careful about what we say"⁸³⁹.

In response to the Diocese's unwillingness to participate in the fiduciary, Mayor Labeaume promised to block the sale of Saint-Charles-de-Limoilou by refusing to change zoning for any

⁸³⁷ See Marie-Josée Savard, « Église Saint-Jean-Baptiste : la Ville verse 180,000 \$ pour des travaux », *La Bourdon du Faubourg*, November 28, 2018, (web), consulted November 2, 2022, <https://bourdonmedia.org/2018/11/28/eglise-saint-jean-baptiste-la-ville-verse-180-000-pour-des-travaux/>.

⁸³⁸ See David Rémillard, « Patrimoine: tensions entre la Ville et le diocèse, John Porter 'désabusé' », *Ici Radio-Canada – Québec*, October 3, 2020, (web), consulted November 2, 2022, <https://ici.radio-canada.ca/nouvelle/1736026/eglise-diocese-patrimoine-religieux-protection-ville-Quebec#:~:text=Politique%20municipale-Patrimoine%20%3A%20tensions%20entre%20la%20Ville%20et%20le%20dioc%C3%A8se%2C%20John%20Porter,malgr%C3%A9%20tout%2C%20selon%20John%20Porter>, original: « Je sors un peu désabusé des deux dernières années. Je me suis farci, je ne sais pas combien de rencontres, d'échanges et ainsi de suite, mais ça ne débouchait jamais ».

⁸³⁹ *Ibid.*, original: « À un moment donné, on se fait dire trop de choses qui accusent l'Église ... Il va falloir que les prises de parole soient bien mesurées ».

project that does not conform with the wishes of the City, a threat that Abbé Dufresne likened to having a “knife at our throat”⁸⁴⁰. The high-ranking clergyman explained that the Diocese’s reticence did not necessarily lie in the governance structure of a fiduciary, but rather in its financing. He explained that the City overestimates the profits from potential church sales. Of the Diocese’s 221 churches owned by 38 parishes, Porter assumed 40 will be sold in the near future. The Diocese, on the other hand, had identified seven to sell within the decade, none of which are worth very much.

The ones that are valuable are those in downtown Quebec City. And among them, two are on the list to be protected. A third, the one in Saint-Sauveur, should be closed to worship in the next few years. The Church is ready to sell them for a symbolic dollar but cannot find a buyer capable of paying the often very high costs of running them⁸⁴¹.

Ultimately, Abbé Dufresne said that the Church was not in the heritage business: “[w]e do not have the objective of preserving heritage for the sake of preserving heritage. We preserve to the extent that we keep buildings that are still used for the mission”⁸⁴² and use the profits from sales to finance the Church’s priority, which is pastoral work. Porter found this a bit precious given that the collectivity paid to construct the buildings in the first place, that the Church profited from them for generations and, now that they are no longer profitable, claimed that their maintenance is not the Church’s mission, but rather a municipal responsibility. Porter said, “[I]t has been like the

⁸⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, original: « un couteau à gorge ».

⁸⁴¹ *Ibid.*, original: « Celles qui ont de la valeur, ce sont celles au centre-ville de Québec. Et parmi elles, deux sont sur la liste à protéger. Une troisième, celle de Saint-Sauveur, devrait être fermée au culte dans les prochaines années. L’Église serait prête à les céder pour un dollar symbolique, mais n’arrive pas à trouver preneur capable d’assumer les frais de gestion courante, souvent très élevés ».

⁸⁴² *Ibid.*, original: « Nous autres, on n’a pas l’objectif de préserver le patrimoine pour en préserver. On préserve dans la mesure où on conserve des bâtiments qui nous servent encore pour la mission ».

world upside down. Even the Diocese and the parishes have been playing a ping-pong match over their responsibilities”⁸⁴³ – in other words, the City and the Diocese were in a standoff.

Both sides, however, were blindsided when the Minister of Culture, Nathalie Roy, said she would consider designating Saint-Sacrement with heritage status on May 20, 2020. Bowing to the public pressure of its upper-class and politically influential residents, the decision directly contravened Porter’s strategy to focus funds on a limited number of old and rare churches – Saint-Sacrement was built between 1920 and 1924 and is not judged to be architecturally distinct – while simultaneously removing a valuable property from the Diocese to sell to support its pastoral care or contribute to Saint-Jean-Baptiste⁸⁴⁴. While the church had been closed to worship and desacralised in 2019, the future did not look good for Très-Saint-Sacrement except for the fact it received heritage status in 2022 from the Ministry of Culture, which meant that funding and vocations for a transformed Saint-Jean-Baptiste dramatically declined⁸⁴⁵.

3. *Malaise*

The aftermath of the fiduciary fiasco led to an unproductive year in 2019. It was especially frustrating for community volunteers, who had nothing to do with the conflict. Neighbourhood Council president Louis Dumoulin expressed his disappointment saying, “[w]e have worked for

⁸⁴³ *Ibid.*, original: « C’était comme le monde à l’envers. Même le diocèse et les paroisses se livrent à une partie de ping-pong quant aux responsabilités ».

⁸⁴⁴ See Jean-François Nadeau, « Le diocèse s’oppose à ce que l’église du Très-Saint-Sacrement soit patrimoniale », *Ici Radio-Canada – Québec*, May 29, 2020, (web), consulted November 2, 2022, <https://ici.radio-canada.ca/nouvelle/1707439/eglise-saint-sacrement-patrimonial-nathalie-roy#:~:text=Le%20dioc%C3%A8se%20de%20Qu%C3%A9bec%20s,la%20ministre%20de%20la%20Culture>.

⁸⁴⁵ See David Rémillard, « Le ministère de la culture classe l’église du Très-Saint-Sacrement » *Ici Québec*, May 23, 2022, (web), consulted December 4, 2024, <https://ici.radio-canada.ca/nouvelle/1885477/eglise-tres-saint-sacrement-decision-classement-ministere-culture-patrimoine#:~:text=il%20comment%C3%A9%20lundi,-.Ferm%C3%A9%20depuis%202019,mena%C3%A7ant%20la%20s%C3%A9curit%C3%A9%20des%20usagers..>

10 years without results. There is nothing dead, but we have no idea where we are going”⁸⁴⁶. While the mayor and the Diocese remained at loggerheads – the mayor famously demanded money instead of prayers and the Diocese laid out how much it spent annually on maintaining the closed church – Dumoulin received a grant to support University of Laval sociologist Pierre Fraser to film a documentary focusing on Saint-Jean-Baptiste as well as a conference dedicated to the church’s situation⁸⁴⁷.

Despite there being no plan for the church, restoration work to the tune of \$1.3 million was carried out in 2019, focusing on masonry and the sprinkler system⁸⁴⁸. Mayor Labeaume introduced a new player to the table during the 2019 federal election when he made the fate of Saint-Jean-Baptiste and electoral issue. The mayor made his support for federal candidates contingent on an agreement of 40 per cent support for a restoration plan that would involve the next-door Saint-Jean-Baptiste elementary school expanding into the church and the creation of community space⁸⁴⁹. Liberal member of Parliament Yves Duclos was enthusiastic about the project; “this is a great project that will turn a tomb into a place of life”⁸⁵⁰. The promised support did not lead anywhere immediately, and Covid-19 wiped out the potential of any development during 2020, but in 2021, the question of Saint-Jean-Baptiste became a major election issue, renewing the vitality with which it was being considered by authorities. Residents had a chance to demonstrate their continued interest in and

⁸⁴⁶ See Baptiste Ricard-Châtelain, « Toujours rien, quatre ans après la fermeture », *Le Soleil*, April 8, 2019, p. 1,2., original : « *On a quand même travaillé 10 ans sans résultats. Il n’y a rien de mort, mais on ne sait pas du tout vers quoi on va* ».

⁸⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸⁴⁸ See Jean-François Nadeau, « Espoir de réouverture de l’église Saint-Jean-Baptiste à Québec », *Le Devoir*, August 15, 2019, p. A5.

⁸⁴⁹ See « Labeaume veut des engagements fédéraux pour la conversion de l’église Saint-Jean-Baptiste », *Ici Radio-Canada – Québec*, October 17, 2019, (web), consulted November 4, 2022, <https://ici.radio-canada.ca/nouvelle/1349773/labeaume-veut-des-engagements-federaux-pour-la-conversion-de-leglise-saint-jean-baptiste>.

⁸⁵⁰ See Olivier Bossé, « Les libéraux paieraient jusqu’à 40 % », *Le Soleil*, October 19, 2019, p. 4, original: « *C’est un super projet qui permettra de transformer un tombeau en lieu de vie* ».

support for the church when, at the end of September 2019, Abbé Gingras re-opened the doors for a brief five hours to show the community the building was still in good shape. The priest was impressed by the thousands of people eager to catch a glimpse inside the church, which had been closed for five years: “you know, when you go through a bereavement, you need time and, very often, a bit like you do with people, you need to go back to the places where you let life stop. People had that desire”⁸⁵¹.

E. Conclusion: From Malaise to Renewal

Predictably, the question of Saint-Jean-Baptiste figured largely in the 2021 municipal election for three main reasons. The first was that, in 2017, progress was being made, with the matching of investment from the Quebec government, the identification of priority churches and plans to create a fiduciary, all detailed above. Second, and most significantly, long-time mayor Régis Labeaume was not seeking re-election, freeing his heir apparent Marie-Josée Savard and the other challengers, like mayoral victor Bruno Marchand to react to the third element: the developments of spring 2021.

Beginning in the spring, after years of inaction, John Porter announced that the Canadian Institute was willing to take part in the church’s transformation. The private, not-for-profit cultural organisation was notably behind the very popular conversion of the Wesley Methodist church into the House of Literature. Porter envisioned a collection of partners in a future transformation hailing

⁸⁵¹ See « L’église Saint-Jean-Baptiste ouvre pour une première fois en plus de 4 ans », *Ici Radio-Canada – Québec*, September 29, 2019, (web), consulted November 8, 2022, <https://ici.radio-canada.ca/nouvelle/1322859/ouverture-exceptionnelle-eglise-saint-jean-baptiste-Québec>, original: « Vous savez, quand on vit un deuil, on a besoin de temps et, bien souvent, un peu comme on le fait avec les personnes, on a besoin de revenir sur les lieux où on a laissé la vie s’arrêter. Les gens avaient ce goût-là. ».

from, the cultural, associational, tourism, and educational spheres⁸⁵². Another development was the abandonment of the proposed fiduciary due to inaction by the City and the Diocese, with the Diocese affirming that it was no longer interested in having anything to do with managing the repairs or running the building, even with chasing funding grants, and that it wanted to discharge itself of the burden entirely as soon as possible. Lastly, a renewed sense of urgency to decide the church's fate arose with the announcement of a new federal infrastructure fund that would fund 50 per cent of the church's \$14 million renovation, on the condition that it changed ownership and was desacralised⁸⁵³.

But, as mayoral candidate Jean Rousseau discovered, the period to apply for those considerable funds had come and gone with the July 6, 2022, submission deadline – the City did eventually submit a project in September, but it was too late⁸⁵⁴. Given that Labeaume's lieutenant, Marie-Josée Savard, oversaw the Saint-Jean-Baptiste dossier, both Rousseau and Bruno Marchand – the latter won the election – criticised their opponent for “dragging her feet” on not one, but two opportunities for tens of millions in federal funds⁸⁵⁵. Despite the gaffe, Savard committed that her election as mayor would mean that the City would assume ownership of the church and proceed with its transformation into a community and cultural centre⁸⁵⁶. Rousseau preferred the idea of the Quebec government nationalising heritage churches and having them managed by municipal

⁸⁵² See David Rémillard, « Les astres s'alignent pour l'église Saint-Jean-Baptiste », *Ici Radio-Canada – Québec*, March 22, 2022, (web), consulted November 8, 2022, <https://ici.radio-canada.ca/nouvelle/1778821/eglise-saint-jean-baptiste-institut-canadien-Québec-patrimoine-john-porter#:~:text=L'Institut%20est%20actuellement%20en,expliqu%C3%A9%20lors%20d'un%20entretien>.

⁸⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁸⁵⁴ See David Rémillard, « Église Saint-Jean-Baptiste : La Ville a échappé une financement majeur », *Ici Radio-Canada – Québec*, September 30, 2021, (web), consulted November 8, 2022, <https://ici.radio-canada.ca/nouvelle/1828294/programme-financement-federal-ville-Québec-eglise-saint-jean-baptiste>.

⁸⁵⁵ See David Rémillard, « Patrimoine : Marie-Josée Savard 'inefficace' selon un ancien du cabinet Duclos », *Ici Radio-Canada – Québec*, October 21, 2021, (web), consulted November 9, 2022, <https://ici.radio-canada.ca/nouvelle/1833532/financement-eglise-saint-jean-baptiste-federal-critiques-marie-josée-savard>.

⁸⁵⁶ See Taïeb Moalla, « Élections municipales : Équipe Savard promet d'acheter l'église Saint-Jean-Baptiste », *Le Journal de Québec*, October 1, 2021, p. 18.

governments via fiduciaries, even though he supported the City taking over Saint-Jean-Baptiste long before Savard's post-Labeaume conversion⁸⁵⁷. Marchand focused on Savard's inaction instead of presenting any concrete proposal of his own, but he did promise to focus on protecting Quebec's heritage in general "to prevent Old Quebec from becoming "a cardboard Walt Disney"⁸⁵⁸. The importance of the election was the signal that not a single serious candidate opposed the purchase (for \$1) of the church but rather competed over who supported it the most.

While the Canadian Institute proceeded with its analysis of potential new vocations for the immense church, the parish went ahead and published a call for offers with a deadline for submissions of April 22, 2022. Theoretically, a proposed project deemed sustainable, and sufficiently lucrative, by the Parish Council could mean the transfer or ownership, even before the City decided how it might intervene. "We hope to receive some [projects] at reasonable prices. Unfortunately, there is no one beating down the door"⁸⁵⁹, explained André Bernier, the parish's director general. But there was one interested group: The Coptic Christian Parish of Vierge-Marie, who had been in talks with the Diocese for just more than a year before it was announced in January 2024 that somehow this small population was willing to take on what neither the Diocese of Quebec nor the City of Quebec was willing to assume⁸⁶⁰. The Coptic Christians changed their

⁸⁵⁷ See Stéphanie Martin, « Patrimoine à Québec : Jean Rousseau accuse Marie-Josée Savard de s'être trainé les pieds », *Le Journal de Québec*, October 15, 2021, (web), consulted November 8, 2022, <https://www.journaldeQuébec.com/2021/10/15/patrimoine-a-Québec-jean-rousseau-accuse-marie-josée-savard-de-setre-traine-les-pieds>.

⁸⁵⁸ See Stéphanie Martin, Patrimoine et Vieux Québec : Marchand ne veut pas un 'Walt Disney en carton' », *Le Journal de Québec*, October 21, 2021, (web), consulted November 8, 2022, <https://www.qub.ca/article/marchand-ne-veut-pas-dun-walt-disney-en-carton-1058967514>.

⁸⁵⁹ See Vincent Pichard, « La deuxième vie de l'église Saint-Jean-Baptiste », *Ici Radio-Canada – Québec*, April 16, 2022, (web), consulted November 9, 2022, <https://ici.radio-canada.ca/nouvelle/1876756/eglise-saint-jean-baptise-renouveau-avenir-travaux-reparations>, original: « On espère en recevoir à des prix raisonnables. Malheureusement, ça ne bouscule pas au portillon ».

⁸⁶⁰ See Vincent Desbiens, « Rachetée pour 1\$: l'église patrimoniale Saint-Jean-Baptiste 'restera une église' », *Le journal de Québec*, January 21, 2022, (web), consulted December 4, 2024, <https://www.journaldeQuébec.com/2024/01/21/rachetee-pour-1-leglise-patrimoniale-saint-jean-baptiste--restera-une-eglise>.

minds in July, or came to their senses, maybe⁸⁶¹. Reactions were mixed. Louis Dumoulin's neighbourhood committee pressed the City and the City pressed the Parish to work and come up with another solution. In all likelihood, the project that will proceed is the one proposed by the architects engaged by the Canadian Institute. Baptised, the Crossroads, the project could eventually consist of

cultural activities, community spaces, multifunctional halls, indoor mezzanine promenade, artists' residences, broadcasting space and major shows to nourish the imagination and foster the development of citizens and tourists, read the study unveiled by the city in 2023⁸⁶².

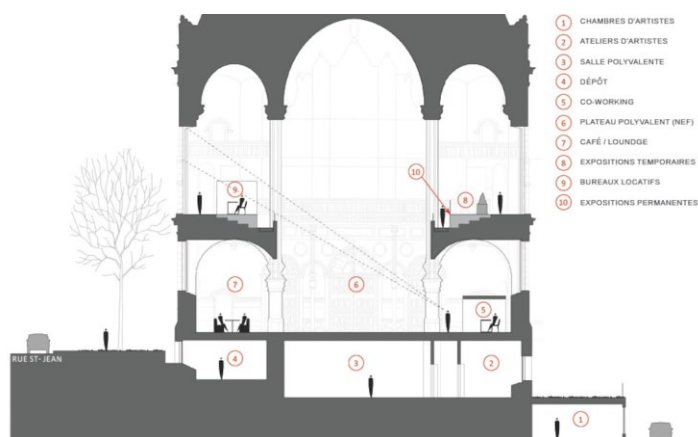


Figure 5 The Crossroads Project, Courtesy of Québec City: Ville de and BGLA Architecture + Design Urbain

Louis Dumoulin e-mailed me recently to let me know of the most recent news in early December. His news was that, extraordinarily, the church was re-opened for a funeral November 23, 2024, and that it would be the last religious ritual performed there. The City assumed ownership by December and Dumoulin saw no reason that community events could not immediately resume in the basement, even though they did not.

⁸⁶¹ See David Rémillard, « La ville achète l'église Saint-Jean-Baptiste pour 175,000 \$ », September 9, 2024, (web), consulted December 4, 2024, <https://ici.radio-canada.ca/nouvelle/2103012/eglise-saint-jean-baptiste-achat>.

⁸⁶² *Idem.*, original: « Le Carrefour regroupera activités culturelles, espaces communautaires, salles multifonctionnelles, promenade intérieure sur les mezzanines, résidences d'artistes, espace de diffusion et spectacles majeurs pour nourrir l'imaginaire et favoriser l'épanouissement des citoyens et des touristes, pouvait-on lire dans l'étude dévoilée par la Ville en 2023 ».

The City is now the owner of Saint-Jean-Baptiste, and its transformation will involve soliciting funds from both the Quebec and federal governments to support work to make the church suitable for new community and cultural vocations, while honouring heritage principles -which will be expensive. The church was desacralised, which rules out future religious functions. From long before its closure to the present, the closure has revealed distinct social groups whose perception of the church's function and representation are informed by their different social roles, identities and beliefs about religion and the Church. The City summarised the principal actors' positions succinctly in its brief to the Ministry of Culture's 2005 Commission on religious heritage, one that rings true 17 years later:

The City is concerned about the social impact of a church in its environment and its position in the urban fabric. The Diocese is more concerned about its pastoral responsibilities, while the Ministry is more and more confined to the recognition of a view of heritage, let's call it, of experts, which will lead it to support only the national "monuments" [At the expense of others]⁸⁶³

One could, instead, advance a less monolithic perspective of our three social domains. For example, from within the Church's response, we see both enthusiasm for and resistance to Saint-Jean-Baptiste's closure.

1. Views on the Institutional Religion

The reaction to the fusion demonstrated well the views of the two camps. On the one side, there were the clergy and the relatively more religiously observant parishioners of Saint-Martyrs-Canadiens, as well as many of the most active parishioners from Saint-Jean-Baptiste who had been

⁸⁶³ See Robert Caron, « Mémoire déposée par la Ville de Québec », Commission de la culture, September 2005, p. 6, (web), consulted August 12, 2022, <http://www.assnat.qc.ca/en/travaux-parlementaires/commissions/CC/mandats/Mandat-3163/memoires-deposes.html>, original : « *La Ville se préoccupe de l'impact social d'une église dans son environnement et sa position dans le tissu urbain, le Diocèse se dit davantage interpellé par ses responsabilités pastorales alors que le Ministère se cantonne de plus en plus dans la reconnaissance d'un patrimoine, appelons-le, d'experts qui l'amènera à ne soutenir que les « monuments » nationaux* ».

carrying the burden for so long and had resigned to the inevitability and felt relief. They also found, after a period of adjustment, Saint-Martyrs-Canadiens to be on a better scale for the Parish's religious needs. On the other side, we see many of the community groups, long-time parishioners with mobility issues, and nostalgically oriented casual practitioners still left in disbelief having no precedent for a similar closure to give them the idea of its possibility. Additionally, we saw that the cultural differences between the two churches and the question of proximity made many of Saint-Jean-Baptiste's parishioners feel unwelcome in the Montcalm Church, meaning the closure removed some Catholics' ability to practise as they once did.

2. *Views on Religious Heritage*

Before, newer churches were the main targets of closure. This makes sense from the political perspective for a number of reasons. Pre-20th century churches are among the most interesting from a heritage perspective, as well as the most difficult to repurpose. The logic goes that the newer churches would be easier to sell and create greater revenues, which could be reinvested in the conservation of the older buildings, which could be effectively combined with government supports. Moreover, best practices to preserve religious heritage are to retain the religious vocation so it makes sense to canalise funding to the oldest and rare examples. No one questions that Saint-Jean-Baptiste possesses a superior heritage value and that it merits preservation, but in the political domain, there was disagreement on who should take ultimate responsibility for the church. The City wanted the Church to retain the property with government support from itself and the Quebec government, and for it to keep its religious vocation, qualifying it for Heritage Council funding. The Quebec government, like the City, had no intention of holding the keys for the church. It squarely rejected the nationalisation of Quebec's five "monsters" in 2010. Though the Ministry of Culture would prefer the Church to keep the building, it is happy for the City to take it on. Neither

level of government, importantly, thought it viable to entrust the massive church to a not-for-profit, such as the one piloted by Louis Dumoulin, Solidarity Space.

3. *Political Views*

On both levels there are strict and open *laïcistes*. Strict like Labeaume, whose policy was that the City does not own churches, or like the federal government's stipulation that religious buildings are ineligible for infrastructure funds. Or open like the three mayoral candidates in 2021, who all had visions for City-Church cooperation, or such as Culture Minister Luc Fortin. Unlike Church leaders, all politicians deemed the idea of a not-for-profit taking ownership as totally unviable, especially after the aborted experience of Saint-Charles-de-Limoilou.

4. *Civil Society*

That position disappointed grassroots civil society actors who banded together to generate innovative ideas for the church and who formed *Espace Solidaire* or Solidarity Space to study projects such as a genealogical research centre, and who have been ceaselessly applying pressure on religious and political figures to return their sorely needed public space back to the community. Grassroots actors responded to the news of closure with tempered enthusiasm. For them it offered an opportunity to endow the neighbourhood's largest community institution with new life and in so doing, the community itself. Through launching the ambitious public consultation immediately after the closure was announced, to soliciting the local elementary school and local entrepreneurs, this group of actors consistently approached the closure with local community-oriented solutions and opposed any project which would limit access to the church, such as the famous traditional arts and trades school solution favoured by the City, the Church and the Quebec government, likely because all three parties assumed another would be responsible for carrying it out.

This was not exactly the case for institutional civil society actors who leaned more towards national solutions like housing the National Archives. Architects, urbanists, and art historians realised that whatever happened to Saint-Jean-Baptiste would initiate a new paradigm in treating religious heritage and thus viewed the problem from a national point of view. John Porter's committee reflected this dynamic, especially in the domain of innovative policy attempts, such as identifying specific churches to save, the notion of a fiduciary and its funding formula. Whereas grassroots civil society's perspective was local, and its orientation was logistical, institutional civil society's perspective was national, and its orientation was symbolic.

This tension was, in fact, present across all three domains: religion, political, and civil society. These massive churches form such an important part of the local urban landscape, culture, and history that actors can often forget that these monumental churches are not simply banal community centres, or way markers punctuating the horizon. While their scale was originally a response to necessity, the maintenance of them for sixty years after the need was eclipsed must also be considered. Their outsized nature in relation to contemporary need is also a powerful symbol of continuity with an increasingly alien national past. Everyone at the table recognised this, but the trouble was that powerful national symbols are expensive, too expensive for a parish of some 500 "active" members, not so evidently too expensive for an Archdiocese, nor so for a major metropolis. The case of Saint-Jean-Baptiste best reveals issues related to governance and the local-national tension that many major churches are bound to face soon. Unlike some closures, Saint-Jean-Baptiste was never really been about money in the sense that it was universally acknowledged as national heritage. It could be found at all levels and was readily given since at least the 1990s. Local portions to qualify diminished from 60 per cent, to 50, to 30, to 20 and finally down to 5 in the most recent round of potential subsidies, demonstrating that governments

appreciate the diminishing capacity of parishes to pay. The real problem was who would own the church. The most obvious solution would have been nationalisation but efforts in that sense worried community groups about access, and while politicians were anxious about setting precedents, the residents of the Saint-Jean-Baptiste neighbourhood have been sorely missing their community hub. As the City moves forward with its project, it will be interesting to see how national and local uses can complement each other now that the thorny question of ownership has been resolved.

VI. Chapter 4, Case II, Analysis of Saint-Jean-Baptiste-de-Québec Closure

A. Introduction



Figure 6 Saint-Jean-Baptiste Aerial View.

Saint-Jean-Baptiste church dramatically revealed itself as my train wound its way down the Saint-Charles River Valley, where it dominates the Upper Town's skyline and informs visitors' first impressions of the symbolic and institutional weight of Quebec City's religious heritage. Since my train arrived a

couple of hours before I was due at the Saints-Martyrs-Canadiens rectory⁸⁶⁴, where I would be staying, I decided to walk from the train station in Lowertown, up the Côte-du-Palais to Saint-Jean Street inside the walls and continue through the Faubourg until the street changed to Sainte-Foy Road. I proceeded all the way to the elegant neo-Roman church, near Parc-des-Braves in the heart of Montcalm, where I would be spending a week as the guest of Abbé Pierre Gingras while meeting with people involved in or affected by Saint-Jean-Baptiste's closure.

Besides offering the welcome opportunity to stretch my legs, the short 3.5 km. walk conveniently spanned the length of the Parish, allowing me to observe the transition through at least five former parishes⁸⁶⁵, which become increasingly wealthy from the impoverished former Saint-Vincent-de-Paul parish on the northeastern extreme of the territory, to the City's economic and political elite

⁸⁶⁴ Which is the administrative centre for the fused parish of Saint-Jean-Baptiste, which comprises three churches: Saints-Martyrs-Canadiens, Saint-Dominique, and Saint-Jean-Baptiste (closed).

⁸⁶⁵ 1. Saint-Vincent-du-Paul (fused & closed 1998), 2. Saint-Jean-Baptiste (fused 1999; closed 2015), 3. Notre-Dame-du-Chemin (fused, closed & demolished 1999), Saint-Dominique (fused 2016) and Saints-Martyrs-Canadiens (fused 1999).

living in the southwestern corner of the Parish. Densely built tenements teeming with students, artists, and marginalised groups straddle Saint-Jean Street, a vibrant main street where a person can find whatever they need within a five-minute walk. They gradually give way to larger apartment blocks near Cartier Street. Soon tiny lawns appear in front of buildings where elegant balconies burst with geraniums, or begonias, between avenues Moncton and de Bienville. Take a right on des Braves Avenue and one passes stately early-twentieth-century villas, which are home to the city's upper crust. While the walk is not far, my destination feels a world apart from my point of departure. The short trip helped me to visualise some of the class dimensions of this case of church closure even before I knocked on the rectory door.

The rectory, a typical 1930s apartment block, was very comfortable, but certainly not reflective of its parish's privilege. When I visited, it was home to Abbé Gingras, two other priests, a layperson, and often hosted visitors like me. I was, in fact, surprised to discover the priests took turns doing the cooking and light cleaning. Abbé Gingras – as many of his parishioners attested – is charismatic. After showing me to my room, he invited me on a tour of his parish later that afternoon. We started next door to the rectory at Saints-Martyrs-Canadiens, which was built in 1929⁸⁶⁶. The church, which seats 1,170 people, cosy only when compared to Saint-Jean-Baptiste's huge volume. The interior is characterised by its elegant simplicity and rich building materials⁸⁶⁷. Next, we visited Saint-Dominique, which was run by the Dominicans until 2008 when they sold their monastery on the *Grande-Allée*⁸⁶⁸ to its next-door neighbour, the National Art Gallery. The monastery was demolished but its church remains. Built around the same time, and nearby to Saints-Martyrs-Canadiens, Saint-Dominique is distinguished by its sombre neo-gothic style,

⁸⁶⁶ Named in honour of the seven martyred Canadian Jesuit missionaries canonised in 1930.

⁸⁶⁷ See Noppen, Luc & Lucie K. Morisset, *Art et architecture des églises à Québec*, Québec, Les Publications du Québec, 1996.

⁸⁶⁸ Québec's answer to the Elysian Fields.

reflective of medieval English abbeys, and is characterised by its extensive and detailed woodworking as well as by its much smaller dimensions⁸⁶⁹ than the other nearby former and current Catholic churches. En route to unlocking Saint-Jean-Baptiste, Abbé Gingras carefully pointed out the condos and building sites where once soared the steeples of the former churches of Saint Patrick's – the first example of closure to scandalise the city when it was demolished in 1987⁸⁷⁰ – Notre-Dame-de-Chemin, demolished in 1999; and the construction site where once stood Saint-Coeur-de-Marie, closed in 1997 and left abandoned to deteriorate until it was demolished in July 2019; almost a year to the day before Abbé Gingras showed me the ever-growing territory of his parish.

We approached the church from above Saint-Jean Street, descending Claire-Fontaine Street, where Abbé Gingras parked his car. From this viewpoint the narrow street's three-storey alley of red-brick tenements foregrounds and frames the imposing Second Empire façade, parvis, and soaring château-style steeple, behind which can be seen the entire span of the Saint-Charles River Valley, hazy in the summer humidity behind the parvis' balustrade. Crossing Saint-Jean Street, I noticed the paint flaking off of the carpentry framing the doors and windows – a state of disrepair still uncommon in most churches of its size, significance and prominent location, but far from shocking in 2020 Quebec City. However, given that it had been closed for five years already when I visited, one could also make the opposite argument that the church seemed to be in reasonably good condition, all things considered. Inside, only superficial signs suggested its long hibernation, such

⁸⁶⁹ When it was temporarily closed in 2010 for construction some 400 to 500 people regularly attended Sunday Mass and would have seemed much fuller than the other churches. See Annie Mathieur, « Une possible seconde vie pour l'église Saint-Dominique », *Le Soleil*, January 16, 2013, (web), consulted December 5, 2024, <https://www.lesoleil.com/2013/01/16/une-possible-seconde-vie-pour-leglise-saint-dominique-7b1a4571afb14d93a41fe6b6d652bffd>.

⁸⁷⁰ See Catherine Lechaussée, « Démolitions d'églises controversée à Québec : à quand remonte le phénomène », *Ici Radio-Canada*, October 4, 2020, (web), consulted March 23, 2023, <https://ici.radio-canada.ca/sujet/ca-date-pas-dhier/actualite/document/nouvelles/article/1738366/demolitions-eglises-patrimoine-promoteurs-Québec-histoire>.

as the dark-coloured film encrusted in the holy water fonts at the entrances where it was seemingly left to evaporate; random boxes or other profane objects left casually throughout the nave, or extension cords draped over pews and sitting in bundles on the floor giving the impression of an interrupted work site. Put otherwise, with a bit of elbow grease, a fresh coat of paint, and a little love, the church could easily have reassumed its former glory. But as Abbé Gingras explained, Saint-Jean-Baptiste's problem was not capital costs, which were regularly covered by religious heritage grants, but rather operational, most notably the cost of heating the immense building, which when it used to be filled by thousands of bodies, was never a problem.

Together, we climbed the spiral staircases to the second level, where the Casavant's organist used to sit perched over the nave facing its many flues, and when he turned around, had the most sweeping view of the church, its nave, arcades, and ornate vaulted ceilings, towards the altar. A small door set in a wood-panelled wall next to the console led to the instrument's inner workings, where a massive bellows sat awaiting the next musician to practise in the empty church, which had been permitted. Ascending another spiral staircase, this one fashioned of rough wood instead of polished stone, led higher into the steeple until the stairs became too narrow to walk with my feet straightforward and where small windows offered incomparable views of the Quebec vista beyond heavy bells. Back on street level, Abbé Gingras allowed me to climb into the ornately sculpted marble pulpit, where I gazed out and tried to imagine the feeling of delivering the last Mass to thousands of resentful neighbours after years of looking out to see the same vessel more vacant than not⁸⁷¹.

⁸⁷¹ The pulpit has not been regularly used since Vatican II reforms when the church would have been regularly full.

Lastly, we looked downstairs, which somehow gave the impression of being even more spacious than the upstairs, probably because of its lack of decoration and neutral colour, both qualities which made it so attractive for the bulk of the neighbourhood's secular activities. For example, the *réveillon de Noël*, or party, following midnight Mass was attended by several hundred residents every year, as well as the popular festivities on the parvis for the national feast day and eponym of the church every June, not to mention housing soup kitchens, markets, sports, clubs, exhibitions and any other kind of activity that required large and inexpensive public space. Though many in the neighbourhood would tell you that the church deserved to be saved for the treasures upstairs, most would admit what was missing most from their daily lives was the social activity, which took place in the unique basement, built into Abraham's Hill, which allowed for its high-ceilinged, utilitarian design. Abbé Gingras readily admitted that the multi-functional space was endowed with its own "*vie du sous-sol*" or "*vie d'en-bas*",⁸⁷² which operated, for the most part outside of his orbit. Downstairs, space was measured by shuffleboard courts instead of the Way of the Cross, and as I passed by the stage to return to ground level, I imagined 1980s bingos, fluorescent lights dimmed by thick clouds of cigarette smoke.

Back on the street, I am led up and around to the parvis – Old French for "*paradisus*". Although the idea of the space as paradise has a liturgical origins – the small courtyard facing churches were theologically designed to welcome catechists – but since medieval times they have been used for communal secular activities. The square in front of Saint-Jean-Baptiste is crowned with a large Sacred Heart of Jesus statue positioned on the cliff-side corner of the plateaued escarpment overlooking the pedestrian link to Deligny Street; the other side is flanked by a public school

⁸⁷² An ironic reference to the cliché *pays d'en haut* to refer to the Saint Lawrence Valley hinterland. He can be seen making this distinction in Pierre Fraser's documentary *Requiem pour une église*, available here: <https://bourdonmedia.org/2017/08/09/requiem-pour-une-eglise-retour-sur-la-fermeture-de-leglise/>.

whose students would have once formed two queues, girls and boys, to cross the plaza into the church for their First Communion. For the densely built and hilly neighbourhood, the parvis is a rare, relatively open flat space, the only one on the same scale aside from Saint-Matthew's cemetery down the street.

Traditionally, the parvis has been used as the site for official functions such as neighbourhood feasts, meetings, and greetings, but when I arrived in the fresh bloom of the post-confinement summer of 2020, the square had a festive air, outfitted with café tables and chairs painted in the same hues as other outdoor pop-up venues paid for by the Ministry of Culture. I chose the spot to interview subjects throughout the week. Once, when it rained, we had to move under the steeple's portico, and it was littered with piles of pigeon waste lying in the same place where the neighbourhood's residents once posed for marriage photographs in front of the community's most prestigious backdrop.

This chapter will report on my week-long ethnographic observation of the neighbourhood's relationship to the church as well as interviews conducted with nine people linked to the closure between July 6th and 12th, 2020, more than five years after Saint-Jean-Baptiste's closure. Interviews focused on participants' social and physical zones of action – religious (upstairs), civic (downstairs), and national (outside/architecture) – and their conceptions of religious heritage's social role, with an aim of yielding interpretations of religious and cultural change in Quebec City viewed through the prism of Saint-Jean-Baptiste's closure. Over the week that I stayed in Quebec City I was thankfully lucky enough to meet exemplary closure participants, even though it was more difficult than in Rimouski because the closure conflict was more structural than personal. No one believed that someone could individually turn that ship in the right or wrong direction, with the exception of Louis Dumoulin, who led a network of grassroots activists in a movement which

a rational person would agree wielded an important influence in the church's destiny. Apart from Dumoulin, Abbé Gingras introduced me to four churchwardens, two of whom were active in the parish heritage council, as well as Dumoulin's collective, who had one foot in the traditionalist Catholic type and the other in the grassroots civil society type, as most do because traditionalist Catholics are the perfect vicarious actors for cultural Catholics. These four offered interesting insights into the grey area between religiously active participants and how they perceived, lived, and moved on from the closure of a church they were very engaged with. Apart from one municipal politician, my fieldwork yielded interview participants who were in the process of reconciling themselves to closure, more than the centre of the conflict, which was between the City and the Archdiocese. Because the relationship was so tense when I arrived in Quebec City, it is understandable that none of the people from the municipal government or the Diocese I reached out to agreed to participate. Instead, I spoke to participants who had all been deeply involved in the Parish, but who had no ability to resolve a steadily developing structural crisis. The Parish could no longer afford increasing annual deficits, which had continued for decades, even if the State provided consistent and generous infrastructural investments. Saint-Jean-Baptiste needed another owner and the conflict was institutional, so that changed the ethnological experience. Things were not as intense as in Rimouski, but the disbelief of the situation might have been stronger. As a result, my analysis of Saint-Jean-Baptiste collected stories that were more centred on the emotions and perceptions of an inevitable event of change and loss as opposed to Rimouski's preeminent coverage of legalism, strategy, and combat. With Saint-Jean-Baptiste, we get a glimpse into the parish side of the closure because of the relative lack of interpersonal conflict; its abstraction provided access. This meant that, in Quebec, the grassroots' strongest civil society forces were not so opposed to the Parish, or the Diocese, for religious reasons, but for

community reasons. There was definitely an anti-desacralisation grassroots force, a representative of which I interviewed, but as you will see, their interests were largely community and identity based

Unlike in Rimouski, where the case centred on two conflicting but ultimately viable courses of action – closing the cathedral to save modern churches or vis versa – Saint-Jean-Baptiste represented more a problem of governance, namely of which organisation, government, not-for-profit or foundation would or could provide sustainable administration for a building in which sacred, civic, and national vocations had always co-existed. Given the breakdown of the classic model of modernity, in which religion, politics, the economy, and the private sphere once mutually reinforced each other⁸⁷³, the fact that they shared space was increasingly the only tie binding Saint-Jean-Baptiste's ever-autonomising zones of social pursuits, a condition made clear by my interviews with key actors from the religious, civil, and national domains of Saint-Jean-Baptiste's closure.

B. Saint-Jean-Baptiste's religious life

By all accounts, Saint-Jean-Baptiste enjoyed a vibrant parish life, outsized compared to its restrained flock of between 300 and 400 regulars when it closed in 2015. The Parish was particularly popular among marginalised residents, such as LGTBQ and impoverished communities. The Parish Council was full of young and energetic churchwardens, and there were various robust committees, such as the one dedicated to promoting the church's religious and architectural history. Of the active parishioners I spoke with, all agreed that Saint-Jean-Baptiste's social mixture had been its source of strength and encouraged social contact between classes in a

⁸⁷³ See Alain Touraine, *La crise de la modernité*, Paris, Fayard, 1992.

manner not seen further uptown or below the escarpment. Saint-Jean-Baptiste's parish culture was open, progressive, and as close to democracy as possible in the Catholic Church.

The four parishioners I spoke with were drawn to their roles as churchwardens as the social expression of their spirituality in the manner of a duty, as opposed to a source of social prestige as it often is elsewhere. All of them were solicited by Abbé Gingras to fill their posts. Put otherwise, no one was breaking down the door to become a churchwarden for Saint-Jean-Baptiste but neither could they refuse Abbé Gingras; nevertheless, I was impressed by the quality of the people Abbé Gingras had scouted to administer his parish.

Before Abbé Gingras' arrival in 2008, Jean-François Fortin moved to the Parish in 2006 and would casually attend Mass, as what he described as "just a parishioner". I met him and Sébastien Lavoie – who will be introduced further down – fortuitously while they were working at the rectory, tardively getting the yard in ship shape after public health restrictions were lifted in July 2020. They took a break from raking to speak with me about their experience of church closure at Saint-Jean-Baptiste. Up on the second story balcony, shaded from the blistering summer sun, Fortin joked that when he was approached by Abbé Gingras to serve as a churchwarden, he did not even know what a *marguillier* was but thought, "why not?". After his three-year term, Fortin enjoyed the work so much that when Abbé Gingras invited Fortin to stay on as the secretary for the Parish Council, he agreed and has occupied that role since 2009⁸⁷⁴.

1. Attempts to Revitalise: Pre-closure

His tenure as parish council secretary offered Fortin ample opportunities to dig into the archives related to Saint-Jean-Baptiste's financial woes and he dated the origins of the search for a revenue-

⁸⁷⁴ See interview with Jean-François Fortin by Ryan Lux, July 10, 2020, 2:00 mins.

generating second vocation for the church to 1995⁸⁷⁵. Even just months before the closure was decided upon, Fortin recalled that various projects were already underway to find a solution to the church's two-decade-long cash shortfall.

We had already held several parish assemblies, not so much to prepare the mentality but to announce, "here is where we are financially, and if nothing happens, well, this is where we end up". It was not yet decided; even if there was pressure, every avenue was still open at that time. But knowing everything that had already been attempted, we knew, that's where we were going. And then in December it was the Diocese that said, "no, it's over, you have to close in May"⁸⁷⁶.

Carole Jacques-Savaria was one of the parishioners working to save Saint-Jean-Baptiste who was caught off-guard by the suddenness and finality of the Diocese's decision. Like Fortin, Jacques-Savaria remembered the shock of the announcement, despite her first-hand knowledge that the church was "always in peril"⁸⁷⁷. As a member of the Parish Heritage Committee, like Fortin, she spent 15 years raising awareness of the church's, and more broadly, the Parish's historical and social value for the neighbourhood. The group mounted exhibitions and organised concerts to valorise the church and to cultivate interest for the church outside of the tight-knit parish community. She recalled that when they opened the church to the non-practising public, "we noticed that there were people who didn't come for the exhibitions, who didn't come to pray, but just to take in the atmosphere of the church. It was as powerful as that"⁸⁷⁸.

⁸⁷⁵ *Idem.*, 1:00 mins.

⁸⁷⁶ *Idem.*, 2:30 mins., original: « On avait déjà fait plusieurs assemblées de la fabrique, non pour préparer la mentalité, mais pour annoncer 'voici, on est là dans la finance, on est rendu là, et s'il ne se passe rien, bien c'est là où on s'en va'. Il n'était pas décidé, même s'il y a des pressions, tout était ouvert à cette époque-là. Mais connaissant tout ce qui était mis sur pied, on savait bien, c'est un peu vers là où on s'en va. Et puis, en décembre c'était le diocèse qui a dit 'non, c'est terminé, vous devez fermer en mai' ».

⁸⁷⁷ See interview with Carole Jacques-Savaria, July 10, 2020, 4:30 mins., original: « Il fallait vraiment la mettre en valeur pour la sauvegarder, sauf qu'elle était toujours en péril, on avait conscience de ça. Il y avait eu une étude faite par Luc Noppen, dans les années 80, qui juge qu'elle était déjà en péril ».

⁸⁷⁸ *Idem.*, 12:00 mins., original: « Pendant les années où on a fait des expositions, où on a accueilli les gens qui venaient de partout, on a remarqué qu'il y a des gens qui ne venaient pas pour les expositions, qui ne venaient pas pour prier, mais juste pour prendre l'ambiance de l'église. C'était aussi puissant que ça ».

The former military housewife and current interior designer started attending Mass at Saint-Jean-Baptiste shortly after she moved to the neighbourhood in 1996 when she and her husband, both Montreal natives, chose to move to Quebec City after many years of postings across the country. Military housewives are known for many things, but chief among them is their skill to quickly integrate into the community following a move. For Jacques-Savaria, the Church had been an invaluable social resource over the years, so, when she and her husband – who lived on Tourelle Street – were out walking, they passed the church's open doors and entered. Met with a warm welcome, the family started attending regularly in preparation for their son's upcoming confirmation and never stopped until they moved closer to Saint-Dominique after Saint-Jean-Baptiste's closure⁸⁷⁹.

The heritage committee was her gateway into more active parish participation. Given her expertise in design, art, and architecture, Abbé Gingras approached Jacques-Savaria to reactivate the Parish Heritage Committee, first established in the 1970s but which had fallen dormant. The committee survived the parish fusion in 1999⁸⁸⁰. From there, she joined a liturgical committee and was elected churchwarden. She explained, smiling, that at Saint-Jean-Baptiste it was hard to not get involved once you became known to Abbé Gingras. For Jacques-Savaria, her experience with leadership roles at the Parish had given her the chance to indulge her interest in event planning and to realise her potential. "This was my first involvement in something like this, and I felt like I grew. Before, I was always involved in school for my kids, and wherever we lived, with the military, there were

⁸⁷⁹ *Idem.*, 1:00 mins., original: « Je suis venu à Québec en 1996 de Toronto. Mon mari est un militaire, mais nous sommes d'origine montréalaise. Donc, mon implication se fait à partir de là, parce que j'ai cherché une façon de connaître des gens et nous sommes catholiques. Donc, je demeurais sur rue de la Tourelle et c'est arrivé simplement qu'un jour on a vu les portes de l'église ouverte et on y est allés. On s'est fait bien recevoir et ensuite mon fils était prêt pour sa confirmation, donc ça s'est déroulé toute naturellement ».

⁸⁸⁰ In fact, the committee still technically survives, even if it is a shell of its heyday in the first 15 years of the millennium.

‘wives clubs’, but never anything like belonging to a group trying to save a church. It was exciting”⁸⁸¹.

Philippe Chagnon, a mechanical engineer, moved to the neighbourhood in 2009. The thirty-something professional began taking Mass at the local parish church, just like he did whenever he moved to a new neighbourhood. By 2020, when we sat down at a café on Saint-Jean Street, Chagnon had recently moved to Val-Bélair to start a family. He still practised at least monthly, but before moving Chagnon never missed Sunday observance.

During Holy Week, I went to mass on Thursday, Friday, Saturday, Sunday and even for Christmas. I've always practised regularly since I was little; I started when I was young and then I just continued⁸⁸².

He remembered that the Parish was already running deficits when Abbé Gingras recruited him for the parish council shortly after he joined the Parish. It was Chagnon who was responsible for presenting the 2014 financial update to the parish assembly mentioned above by Jean-François Fortin, and which Chagnon described as “an absolute last warning”⁸⁸³. In fact, Chagnon’s entire term as churchwarden was dominated by trying to increase revenues. Of all the attempts, the one that Chagnon remembered as standing the best chance of success was the one proposed by *Espace Solidaire* – or Solidarity Space – a secular not-for-profit formed in 2010, dedicated to partnering neighbourhood business and civic leaders with members of the Parish to find a revenue-generating

⁸⁸¹ See interview with Carole Jacques-Savaria, July 10, 2020, 10:00 mins., original: « *C'était ma première implication dans quelque chose comme ça et moi, je trouvais que j'ai grandi. Avant, j'étais toujours impliquée à l'école pour mes enfants et, à travers des voyages qu'on a faits en tant que militaire, il y avait de « wives' club », mais jamais quelque chose aussi gros de faire partie d'un groupe pour sauvegarder une église. C'était passionnant* ».

⁸⁸² See interview with Philippe Chagnon by Ryan Lux, July 6, 2020, 33:00 mins., original: « *Quand j'habitais ici dans le quartier, j'ai assisté tous les dimanches. Pendant la Semaine sainte, j'allais à la messe jeudi, vendredi, samedi, dimanche et même chose pour Noël. Moi, j'ai toujours été très pratiquant depuis que j'étais jeune. C'est quelque chose qui surprend le monde. J'ai commencé quand j'étais jeune et puis j'ai juste continué. Donc, j'ai reçu tous mes sacrements à l'école - ce qu'ils ne font plus. C'était ma mère qui m'a vraiment inculqué ma foi* ».

⁸⁸³ *Idem.*, 20:00 mins., original: « *Moi, je me suis impliqué au budget et les finance plutôt, comme marguillier. Donc, l'Abbé Pierre m'a demandé de monter une présentation pour une assemblée des paroissiennes, 2014, pour présenter la situation financière aux paroissiennes. Une toute dernière alerte, disons* ».

second vocation for the enormous church. Until the closure in 2015, *Espace Solidaire* was more of a concept than a public actor. Until then, its realm was more the backroom, where it coordinated local leadership around the mission of shepherding the failing parish towards some kind of salvation. For example, they participated in the short-lived *Ékklesia* project, which proposed transforming part of the nave into a banquet hall.

In any case, Chagnon recalled that the best and worst proposals shared the same structural defects: first, any new vocation required a significant investment from the Parish, fluctuating between 20 and 50 per cent of capital costs, which the Parish could not raise, and second, that to proceed, projects had to prove that they could be financially viable, which was impossible⁸⁸⁴. With only one in 25 parishioners paying their tithe⁸⁸⁵, Chagnon explained that parish administrators, himself included, could not help but regretfully conclude that the church was doomed in its present configuration, oriented as it was, overwhelmingly to unprofitable community and religious vocations. Abbé Gingras said that early in 2014, most of the Parish leadership had realised, “There were no longer the means, so we tried to save the furniture, as they say, by organising many things during the summer, but there was not enough to cover the expenses”⁸⁸⁶, which ultimately led the bishop to, *de facto*, order the church’s closure by ceasing to cover its chronic annual deficit.

⁸⁸⁴ *Idem.*, 4:00 mins., original: « Mais le problème, c'est que c'était un projet qui nécessitait certains fonds. La ville était prête à embarquer, je ne sais pas si c'était 30%, 40%, ou 50 % qui viennent du milieu, mais c'était ça, l'argent, qu'on n'avait jamais. Puis ce sont les projets qui avaient même besoin de prouver qu'ils pourraient gagner leurs frais à long terme. Quand je pense que tous ces projets ont eu un peu le même problème qui a été qu'ils n'étaient pas capables de prouver leur rentabilité ».

⁸⁸⁵ See interview with Philippe Chagnon by Ryan Lux, July 6, 2020.

⁸⁸⁶ See interview with Abbé Pierre Gingras by Ryan Lux, July 8, 2020, 2:00 mins., original: « Les gens prenaient conscience qu'on n'a plus les moyens, alors on a essayé de sauver les meubles, comme on dit, en organisant beaucoup de choses pendant l'été, mais ce n'a pas été suffisamment pour couvrir les dépenses. Ce qui fait qu'au bout d'un certain temps, on a convoqué une assemblée de paroisse pour dire aux gens « voici la situation financière, et s'il n'y a pas de changement, on s'en va vers la fermeture ».

2. *The Rites of Closure*

When Abbé Gingras said the last Mass on the Feast of the Pentecost, it was likely the first time he had seen some of the 2,000 people – mostly his own parishioners by canon law - who came to mourn “their” church. “Church closures are always hard”, according to Abbé Gingras, who oversaw the closures of Vanier’s Notre-Dame-du-Cap chapel (sold to the City in 1993) and Saint-Eugène (sold to the City in 1997), Limoilou’s Sainte-Odile (demolished in 2007), and Sainte-Foy’s Saint-Louis-de-France (demolished in 2020). “We proceeded to close it with great sadness, because we are not here to close the churches, we are here to take care of them and fill them up, but we were not able to do it anymore”⁸⁸⁷. He described the Mass after the closure announcement and the last Mass as a “mortuary ritual”⁸⁸⁸. While he appreciated the grief of his regular parishioners and community groups, he likened the 1,800 others’ interest in the last Mass to the queue of distant relatives and neighbours, whose curiosity brings them to the funeral parlour to get one last look at the deceased at the wake⁸⁸⁹.

For parish council secretary, Jean-François Fortin, the most poignant farewell Mass was not that of the Pentecost but rather the 2014 Midnight Mass, which he and only a handful of others knew would be the last celebrated in the storied church. Only weeks before, as he was taking the minutes of the meeting with the Archdiocese, Fortin remembered recognising that he was taking part in a

⁸⁸⁷ *Idem.*, 4:00 mins., original: « On a procédé à la fermeture à la Pentecôte 2015. Bien sûr, dans la grande tristesse, parce qu’on n’est pas là pour fermer les églises, on est là pour les entretenir, puis les remplir et on n’était plus capable ».

⁸⁸⁸ *Idem.*, 10:00 mins., original: « Après la communion on a fait tous les rituels de fermeture, on a enlevé les pierres d’autel, les reliques, le cierge pascal, c’était vraiment une célébration mortuaire. Par la sortie, tout le monde de l’église, ça a pris deux grands fils de sortie pour que tout le monde sorte de l’église. Une fois les gens assemblés sur le parvis, là, on a donné une dernière volée de cloches, et là, ça a été vraiment émotif. On l’a écoutée en silence jusqu’à la fin, puis j’ai fermé les portes je les ai verrouillées de l’intérieur, et puis j’ai frappé pour savoir si c’est bien barré et, lui, le sacristain, a frappé pour répondre « oui ». Je me suis retourné pour donner la bénédiction aux fidèles. Alors, on les a invités au prochain rendez-vous à Saints-Martyrs-Canadiens le dimanche prochain ».

⁸⁸⁹ *Idem.*, 9:00 mins., original: « Quand on a annoncé qu’on allait avoir la dernière messe, bon, après ça, l’église était remplie. C’est comme si les gens sont allés au salon funéraire pour voir le défunt une dernière fois ».

significant historical episode when he recorded the outcome of the discussion⁸⁹⁰. During the Christmas Mass, sitting above the nave in the choir, where he was seated as an altar server, Fortin took the time to savour

every minute of that celebration; how you see the people in the nave; who's placed where; the lights; the atmosphere; the decorations; and I was very emotional when the celebration was over. And I said to myself, 'Yeah, we're coming back next week but it's going to be in a very different context'⁸⁹¹.

Sexton, Sébastien Lavoie, who I also spoke with at the rectory, remembered his disbelief when he learned that Saint-Jean-Baptiste would close. Even though he was an active volunteer with the Saint-Vincent de Paul Society and lived just behind the church, Lavoie told me he did not notice any warning signs leading up to the March 2015 announcement, which was frustrating for him because it meant finding a new location for the society's food bank, soup kitchen and clothing distribution operations – groups he volunteered with – to a new, less central location⁸⁹². In the mid-2000s when he first moved to Quebec City, Lavoie said he used to go to Mass at the cathedral, Notre-Dame-de-Québec, down the road from Saint-Jean-Baptiste, but was gradually drawn to the faubourg parish by Abbé Gingras' charisma. Starting with serving as a reader and other liturgical

⁸⁹⁰ See interview with Jean-François Fortin by Ryan Lux, July 10, 2020, 4:00 mins., original: « *C'était un choc parce que, moi personnellement, quand j'ai écrit ça dans les procès-verbaux, je me suis dit : « oh c'est historique ça, fermer l'église Saint-Jean-Baptiste ».*

⁸⁹¹ *Idem*, 5:00 mins., original: « *Et le Noël après la semaine après - je suis servant à la messe - j'ai l'émotion dans ma gorge, parce que je sais que c'est la dernière fois qu'on célèbre Noël à Saint-Jean-Baptiste et je prenais le temps de tout savourer : chaque minute de cette célébration; comment on voit les gens dans la nef; qui est placé où; les lumières; l'atmosphère; les décorations; et j'étais très émotif quand la célébration s'est terminée. Et je me suis dit 'oui, on revient la semaine prochaine, mais ça va être dans un contexte vraiment différent' ».*

⁸⁹² See in interview with Sébastien Lavoie by Ryan Lux, July 10, 2020, 11:00 mins., original: « *Et jusqu'à ce j'ai appris les nouvelles en 2015, c'est quand j'en ai pris connaissance, alors voilà, j'étais placé devant le fait accompli. Moi, j'étais très surpris. Il m'a très, très, très, très, étonné parce que je n'ai pas vu des signes avant-coureurs de tout. Alors, c'est sûr que sa décision m'a surpris ».*

roles, Lavoie became more and more involved in parish life⁸⁹³. Lavoie experienced the closure as having the centre pulled out of the community:

It was really disappointing because it has meant that people were going to separate, that people were going to have to celebrate elsewhere. It feels like there was a centre that was removed. A church remains a centre, it attracts people, it binds the parish community, so by removing a monument like that, by closing the church, well, we have the impression that there is a dispersal⁸⁹⁴.

Even though former churchwarden Philippe Chagnon ended up moving away from the neighbourhood around the time of the church closure, he told me that its absence had noticeably altered the quarter's social fabric. He recalled being struck by the dissonance of the last Mass: "The church was full. I think there were 2,500 people inside. So, we saw that residents of the neighbourhood were quite attached to the church, so it was a bit of a paradox"⁸⁹⁵. For Chagnon, the attendance of the last Mass was a better way of reflecting the number of people who actually used the church on a weekly basis as opposed to evaluating the viability of the church based on the number of people who attended Mass.

I think the closure makes the community less strong because even people who aren't exactly 'religious' still go there because basically the church is right in the middle of the neighbourhood. So, on the weekends, even if they didn't go to church, Sundays followed the rhythm of the church. When everything closed,

⁸⁹³ *Idem.*, 10:00 mins., original: « Au tout début, quand je suis arrivé ici, j'assister toujours à la basilique, puis quand l'abbé Pierre est arrivé à l'église Saint-Jean-Baptiste, j'assumais à fréquenter l'église Saint-Jean-Baptiste. J'aimais beaucoup l'abbé Pierre et tout ça, puis, tranquillement, il m'impliquait d'abord comme lecteur et différentes choses pour la liturgie ».

⁸⁹⁴ *Idem.*, 13:00 mins., original: « C'est sûr que c'est décevant, parce que ce que ça signifie, c'est que les gens vont se séparer, que les gens vont devoir célébrer ailleurs. On a un peu l'impression qu'il y avait un centre, qui était retiré. Une église, c'est quand même un centre, ça attire les gens, ça soude la communauté paroissiale, alors en retirant un monument comme ça, en fermant l'église, bien on a l'impression qu'il y a une dispersion qui se fait ».

⁸⁹⁵ See interview with Philippe Chagnon by Ryan Lux, July 6, 2020, 10:00 mins., original: « Pour le jour de fermeture, l'église était pleine. Je pense qu'il y avait 2,500 personnes dedans. Donc, on voit que les résidents du quartier sont pas mal attachés à l'église, alors c'était un peu paradoxal ».

the residents of the neighbourhood lost a place for spontaneous social interactions⁸⁹⁶.

3. *Saints-Martyrs-Canadiens: A Marriage of Convenience*

Thus, despite longstanding efforts to hold back the tide of church closure, even those close to parish administration were surprised and shocked when the dyke finally broke, perhaps in the manner that a lifelong smoker still experiences shock when he receives his cancer diagnosis. After the initial shock, parishioners felt the ripple effects of the Church's void in the neighbourhood identity and practising Catholics were newly troubled by the class friction they now faced between either descending rue Saint-Jean to Notre-Dame-de-Québec or climbing up to Montcalm to take Mass at Saints-Martyrs-Canadiens, where they technically belonged. Despite many people's reactions that the older church should have been kept for heritage reasons, Chagnon acknowledged that, from a practical perspective, it was never a question that Saints-Martyrs-Canadiens was a better choice to keep open. It was newer, in better condition, and less expensive to heat. "So, the choice was easy to make. In addition, we were able to see the addresses where the donations came from, and they came much more from Saints-Martyrs-Canadiens. It was much more self-sufficient"⁸⁹⁷. And while the decision looked good on paper, Jean-François Fortin admitted that it came at a considerable cost. Remember the radically different social composition of Saints-

⁸⁹⁶ *Idem.*, 12:00 mins., original: « Je pense que ça rend la communauté moins forte, parce que donc même les gens qui ne collent pas à l'église allaient là parce que, dans le fond, l'église est en plein cœur du quartier. Donc, la fin de semaine, même s'ils ne fréquentaient pas l'église, les dimanches étaient rythmés par l'église. Quand tout a fermé, les résidents du quartier perdaient un lieu et des instances réguliers de rassemblement ».

⁸⁹⁷ *Idem.*, 9:00 mins., original: « Je pense qu'on n'a pas vraiment eu du choix, parce que la décision se passait plutôt au niveau du diocèse. On a été consultés, mais je pense que c'était décrété d'en haut. Donc, je pense que l'abbé Pierre, puis le président de l'assemblée avaient déjà discuté. Puis, tout le monde pouvait s'en douter parce que, de ces deux églises Saints-Martyrs-Canadiens, c'est beaucoup plus récent, c'est construit en 1930 et le bâtiment est beaucoup plus en état, beaucoup moins cher à chauffer, à entretenir. Donc, le choix a été facile à faire, disons. En plus, on était capable de voir les adresses d'où les dons viennent, et ils venaient beaucoup plus de Saints-Martyrs-Canadiens. Elle était beaucoup plus autosuffisante ».

Martyrs-Canadiens' congregation and add to that its very different aesthetic and it is easy to understand how uprooted Saint-Jean-Baptiste regulars felt that first Sunday after the closure.

It left me with the impression that I owned a house and had been locked out of it. On Sundays I sat in the same pew and the same people were always around. I was at home. I felt like I belonged to a community. I have adapted to the pain of having lost my home; the faith I still have is strong as ever, but there is a certain attachment that I miss ... Even though I still see the community members around, it's not the same as it was at Saint-Jean-Baptiste⁸⁹⁸.

But of course, not all change is negative. Fortin noticed a change in the way former Saint-Jean-Baptiste parishioners recognised one another immediately following the move to Saints-Martyrs-Canadiens. Whereas before, they would politely exchange nods when their glances crossed, now the fraternity of bereavement sowed the seeds of a more authentic exchange⁸⁹⁹. As with any migration, however, not everyone's religious practice survived the journey, which explains why the mutual recognition of those who continued to worship together by hook or by crook was so significant: in each other they see an openness to a more mobile approach to religion, which they considered to be more authentic. Fortin acknowledged that parish leadership knew that they would lose members over the closure and that some of these would probably never attend Mass ever again – a weighty consideration if ever there was one⁹⁰⁰. Years later, when I spoke with Fortin, it seemed

⁸⁹⁸ See interview with Jean-François Fortin by Ryan Lux, July 10, 2020, 45:00 mins., original: « *Moi, ça me laisse l'impression que je possédais une maison et on a mis la clé dans la porte, puis je ne peux plus entrer alors que c'était chez-moi, c'était ma place. Les dimanches, je m'assois à peu près toujours dans le même banc et toujours à peu près les mêmes gens sont autour. Je suis chez-moi; c'est mon espace à moi intérieur. Que j'ai ma place là et que j'y vis communautairement et on a mis une clé dans la porte et je peux plus entrer. Il faut que j'adapte, mais la douleur d'avoir perdu ma maison, la foi je l'ai encore, mais il y a un certain attachement qui me manque. Ça existe ici à Saints-Martyrs-Canadiens, mais il y avait quelque chose de plus que je retrouvais à Saint-Jean-Baptiste. Puis je revois les gens, puis je revois les membres de la communauté, mais ce n'est pas Saint-Jean-Baptiste* ».

⁸⁹⁹ *Idem.*, 48:00 mins., original: « *Pendant les premières semaines qui suivaient la fermeture, tout était différent, mais c'était agréable. Le dimanche à Saints-Martyrs-Canadiens, il y avait quelque chose dans la reconnaissance lorsqu'on voyait des gens de Saint-Jean-Baptiste. Si on se croisait à Saint-Jean-Baptiste, on leur aurait donné un petit signe de tête, ou peut-être un sourire. Il est important, quand on les voit à Saints-Martyrs-Canadiens, de dire 'bonjour! Comment ça va?'. Cet échange, c'est devenu primordial qu'on se reconnaisse, qu'on dise « tu n'es pas tout seul ».*

⁹⁰⁰ *Idem.*, 5:30 mins., original: « *Il y avait aussi l'espoir de voir migrer la communauté ici à Saints-Martyrs-Canadiens, tout en sachant qu'on perdrait des membres. Il y avait des gens qui étaient contre la fermeture, qui sont encore contre la fermeture et qui probablement ne rentrent plus jamais à l'église* ».

that the survivors chose to see the shedding of less committed members in a manner that prepared them for an acceleration of church closures.

There are Christ's disciples and there are disciples of stones. We wished their faith would have been strong enough to say, 'I'm still going to believe. I'm still going to continue to practise', but there are people who have decided to do it differently⁹⁰¹.

Even though Philippe Chagnon continued to commute to Saints-Martyrs-Canadiens often, all the way from Val-Bélair, he understood that there were reasons why some people either could not or would not settle their religious practice in Montcalm. On the side of those who could not, Chagnon accepted that, despite grand gestures promising carpooling for any parishioner wanting to attend Mass, the scheme was simply an unrealistic solution for a neighbourhood predicated upon density, and that those, unlike himself, who could not swap a routine five-minute walk to church from his former apartment on Richelieu Street, for a vigorous half-hour walk to Saints-Martyrs-Canadiens, would inevitably be casualties of the closure⁹⁰². With respect to those who would not, Chagnon said he understood. Anecdotally, he argued more people attended Saint-Jean-Baptiste than Saints-Martyrs-Canadiens each week and that the justification to retain the latter church was based on its financial weight in the anachronistically named parish. As such not only might the economic status of Montcalm residents make residents of Saint-Jean-Baptiste uncomfortable, but they might also

⁹⁰¹ *Idem.*, 6:00 mins., original: « Il y a les disciples du Christ et il y a les disciples de Pierre. On aurait que leur foi soit assez forte pour dire 'je vais quand même continuer de croire. Je vais quand même continuer de pratiquer'. Mais, il y a des gens qui ont décidé de le faire autrement ».

⁹⁰² See interview with Philippe Chagnon by Ryan Lux, July 6, 2020, 2:00 mins., original: « Pendant ces jours-là, je pense qu'il y en avait plus de paroissiens qu'à Saints-Martyrs-Canadiens, parce qu'on est un quartier beaucoup plus dense, pendant que Saints-Martyrs-Canadiens, ce sont plutôt des maisons individuelles. Moi, j'habitais sur rue Richelieu, puis, pour me rendre à l'église [Saint-Jean-Baptiste] ça me prenait peut-être cinq minutes à pied au maximum; donc, nous sommes dans un petit rayon où il y a beaucoup de gens, alors il y avait plus de monde à l'église. Pour ces gens-là, de partir d'ici, puis marcher à Saints-Martyrs-Canadiens, ce que j'ai fait, ça prend au moins une demi-heure, et je marche quand même assez vite, alors pour une personne âgée, c'est beaucoup plus difficile. Alors c'est super difficile même si on organisait le covoiturage. Bref je ne sais pas s'il y a des récriminations, il y avait des gens qui n'étaient pas contents et d'autres qui ont juste arrêté d'y aller, parce que c'était rendu trop loin de transférer ».

resent the Church for rubbing their faces in how their relative poverty led to their own church's closure⁹⁰³.

As Carole Jacques-Savaria put it so aptly, Saint-Jean-Baptiste church and its users' religious life had been carried out in peril since the 1990s when the phenomenon of church closures first emerged in Quebec and its closure became vaguely imaginable, but after 20 years people became desensitised to the threat. In addition, for engaged parishioners, the congregation did not seem to be in its death throes. Parishioners remembered a vibrant parish life characterised by its diverse congregation and its deep roots in the community. Following its fusion with Saints-Martyrs-Canadiens in 1999, it was clear that one or the other would be forced to close and the Diocese's decision to keep the wealthy church cost an already beleaguered Church some of its most ardent followers. But the faubourg's residents did not just lose their worship space, religiously active residents joined their lapsed and non-religious neighbours in the loss of what amounted to their only community space.

C. Saint-Jean-Baptiste's Community Life

Immediately at the crossroads of the church's religious and community life was its annual Christmas Eve Party, or the *réveillon de Noël*, when hundreds of the neighbourhoods' residents would descend the stairs from the packed nave to the church basement, where they would share a full-Christmas dinner. Many of the *réveillonneurs* were the same people who often used the church

⁹⁰³ *Idem.*, 1:00 mins., original: « *Quand on a annoncé la fermeture aux paroissiennes, il y a eu les conséquences. Bons, il y a eu beaucoup de paroissiens du quartier Saint-Jean-Baptiste qui n'ont juste pas transféré à Saints-Martyrs-Canadiens. Moi, je continuais d'aller à l'église Saints-Martyrs-Canadiens, mais je sais que beaucoup de paroissiens, que je voyais à l'église Saint-Jean-Baptiste, n'ont pas transféré à l'église Saints-Martyrs-Canadiens. Donc, est-ce qu'ils ont abandonné leur pratique? Où est-ce qu'ils écoutent la messe à la télé? Je ne sais pas* ». *Idem.*, 3 :00 mins. « *Pour la messe comme telle, moi, je ne vois pas une différence, ce sont les mêmes acteurs. Je pense que c'est plus que les gens ne sont pas habitués de se rencontrer ici, de se retrouver dans une autre communauté où ils se ne connaissent pas les autres paroissiens, ce qui crée un peu de distanciation, qui fait qu'ils ont juste arrêté d'y aller. J'ai continué d'y aller quand même, puis j'ai rencontré d'autres gens* ».

basement for more mundane activities such as receiving a hot lunch, the food bank, or alcoholics anonymous meetings. And while the church basement heavily catered to the neighbourhood's poorest residents, it was not a ghetto. Skimming a list of the organisations which used the basement in 2015, one can see the neighbourhood's People's Committee, the City, Elections Canada, various liturgical and social justice groups, multiple theatre troupes, political parties of all stripes, as well as business groups and individuals. In other words, the uniquely spacious subterranean space, owing to its placement on the side of an escarpment, is where the vast majority of the community's 'society' took place.

1. Charitable Life of the Church Basement

Most people I spoke with insisted that the church was far more widely used as a community centre than a place of worship. I met with Richard Émond, who worked with the Saint-Vincent de Paul Society and lived nearby, on the parvis to discuss how the closure had impacted the segments of the community which had depended upon Saint-Jean-Baptiste the church. Though Émond attended Mass semi-regularly for the ten years he lived in the faubourg before the closure, his practice waned after the closure⁹⁰⁴. He was among the group, mentioned above, who were capable of walking to Saints-Martyrs-Canadiens. In fact, he grew up there, but who would feel uncomfortable, as well as resentful, amongst them⁹⁰⁵. Émond was also the person I was interviewing when a July deluge forced us to take cover under the church steeple, and he pointed out the mounds of pigeon waste as a direct consequence of keeping people away from what he calls the "lungs of the

⁹⁰⁴ See interview with Richard Émond by Ryan Lux, July 11, 2020, 13:00 mins., original: « *Oui, je suis croyant, pratiquant, je dirais moyenne, mais depuis la fermeture, je pratique beaucoup moins* ».

⁹⁰⁵ *Idem.*, 3:30 mins., original: « *Je suis originalement de Saints-Martyrs-Canadiens, mais c'est une paroisse de riches, et tout a été déplacé vers Saints-Martyrs-Canadiens, parce que Saint-Jean-Baptiste c'est une paroisse populaire* ».

neighbourhood”⁹⁰⁶. Émond was offended by what he perceived as the hypocrisy of the Church’s keeping Saints-Martyrs-Canadiens open at the expense of Saint-Jean-Baptiste:

It is difficult for people here to make the trip. The old people who used to go to church here are less fortunate; none of them have a car, but in Saints-Martyrs everyone has a car. Saint-Jean-Baptiste is a monument. Saints-Martyrs-Canadiens is not declared a historical monument. They should have closed Saints-Martyrs-Canadiens and left Saint-Jean-Baptiste and restored it. Take another example: they're going to restore Saint-Sacrement. It made me jump out of my chair! The money that they spent on Saint-Sacrement and the walls are not solid; they could put it for Saint-Jean-Baptiste. We are the original quarter and here it is much older than Saints-Martyrs-Canadiens or Saint-Sacrement⁹⁰⁷.

When Émond learned of the closure, he was not necessarily anti-clerical, but his populist nerve was struck by its class implications, which motivated him to canvass residents walking down Saint-Jean Street during the spring open-air bazaar to sign a petition which urged the Parish to reconsider its closure decision. He and the petition’s co-author, Ruth Parisé – who helped run a wholesale buyers group out of the church basement and former neighbourhood council member – gathered 291 signatures between the street fair, or *Kermesse*, held between May 16th and 17th, 2015, and the food bank distribution earlier that week⁹⁰⁸. Canvassing gave Émond an opportunity to listen and to hear from residents regarding their concerns about future uses of the church if it did not re-open for religious practice, which was the goal of his petition. He said that residents overwhelmingly supported a community vocation, which might include a mix of affordable housing and community

⁹⁰⁶ *Idem.*, 3:00 mins., original: « Ici, c'est les poumons du quartier. C'est comme l'école. Les personnes moins âgées, peut-être les jeunes vont moins à l'église, mais c'est les poumons du quartier ».

⁹⁰⁷ *Idem.*, 4:00 mins., original: « C'est difficile pour les gens d'ici de faire le déplacement. Les personnes âgées qui allaient à l'église ici sont moins fortunées - ils n'ont presque pas d'automobile. Mais à Saint-Martyrs, tout le monde a une automobile. Saint Jean-Baptiste, c'est un monument. Saints-Martyrs-Canadiens, ce n'est pas déclaré monument historique; ils auraient dû fermer Saints-Martyrs-Canadiens, puis laisser Saint-Jean-Baptiste et la restaurer. Prends un autre exemple, ils vont restaurer Saint-Sacrement : ça m'a fait lever comme ça! L'argent qu'ils mettent pour Saint-Sacrement, les murs ne sont pas solides, ils pourraient le mettre pour Saint-Jean-Baptiste. C'est nous le faubourg et ici c'est beaucoup plus âgé que Saints-Martyrs-Canadiens ou Saint-Sacrement ».

⁹⁰⁸ See Richard Émond & Ruth Parisé, « Pétition: Sauvons le bâtiment, patrimonial, de l'église Saint-Jean-Baptiste », presented to Abbé Pierre Gingras, May 20, 2015, accessed from the Parish archives.

spaces where residents could meet to play cards or board games, host cinema nights or concerts for young people⁹⁰⁹. But his efforts were ignored by the Church, something which did not surprise Émond. “Sometimes our opinions are not listened to. So, we must act. Like the priest, he didn't listen to us, and he won't listen to us. We had no answer to the petition. He wanted nothing to do with it”⁹¹⁰. The lack of response left a bad impression on Émond who had always respected the clergy up to that point and who saw the church's religious vocation as the surest way for it to continue meeting community needs.

I didn't find it very 'Catholic' because the church belongs to the people of the neighbourhood, it doesn't belong to the priest or the churchwardens. It belongs to all the people of the neighbourhood who paid for that church. They gave them the money every Sunday, the tithe every year, so the church doesn't belong to the parish priest or the diocese⁹¹¹.

He worried that, like so many other churches, the authorities would leave Saint-Jean-Baptiste to deteriorate until it would be past the point of no return and that would be replaced by condominiums, which could accelerate a disturbing gentrifying trend. Moreover, Émond evaluated the closure as having been absolutely catastrophic for the dozens of community groups who depended on the church basement, as well as for the wide-ranging constituencies they served⁹¹².

⁹⁰⁹ See interview with Richard Émond by Ryan Lux, July 11, 2020, 26:00 mins., original: « *Les gens parlent surtout du communautaire, beaucoup de communautaire. Ce qu'on entend par communautaire, c'est de construire des logements de prix modique, c'est de faire un centre communautaire. Les personnes pourraient se rencontrer, jouer aux cartes, jouer au jeu de société, aller au cinéma ou à une salle de spectacle où des jeunes peuvent faire des spectacles* ».

⁹¹⁰ *Idem.*, 23:00 mins., original: « *Nos opinions parfois, sont très peu écoutées. Des fois, il faut agir. Comme le curé ne nous a pas écoutés et il ne nous écouterait pas. On a eu aucune réponse à la pétition. Il ne veut rien savoir* ».

⁹¹¹ *Idem.*, 1:00 mins., original: « *Je ne l'ai pas trouvé très catholique, parce que l'église appartient aux gens du quartier, elle n'appartient pas au curé ni aux marguilliers. Elle appartient à tous les gens du quartier qui ont payé pour cette église-là. Ils leur ont donné l'argent tous les dimanches, la dîme a toutes les années, donc l'église n'appartient pas simplement au curé ni au diocèse* ».

⁹¹² *Idem.*, 5:00 mins., original: « *Les organismes communautaires perdaient un centre. Ils perdaient un centre, où ils pouvaient se rencontrer. Il n'y en a pas dans le quartier ici, un endroit où les personnes peuvent se rencontrer* ».

Yet despite the long closure, Émond remained resolute that any murmur of its destruction would be met with street protests and occupations⁹¹³.

In his defence, Abbé Gingras used the same facts to make the opposite point. He suggested that his critics should lay at least some of the blame on the City for dramatically underserving the neighbourhood with civic space and depending instead on the Church to serve those functions while leaving his dwindling congregation to foot the bill on behalf of the entire quarter. Furthermore, rather than condemning their eviction, the priest would welcome some credit for the decades of civic life the Parish fostered, a service taken for granted perhaps because “we sure don't usually shout about our charitable works from the roof tops”⁹¹⁴.

Carole Jacques-Savaria was among those who recalled the outsized role the Parish played in the neighbourhood's social wellbeing. She explained the charitable web that formed around the Parish as an “ecosystem” and that Saint-Jean-Baptiste was known across the city as having the most significant community life: “There were many, many community groups. There was a whole community of volunteers. Everyone knew each other, and every year between 1999 and 2010, there was a volunteer party held in the basement of the church. There was a whole social life that was grafted onto the church”⁹¹⁵.

⁹¹³ *Idem.*, 8 :00 mins., original : « Moi, je me pose cette question, « est-ce qu'on attend qu'elle devienne dangereuse pour la détruire? Pour faire des grands condos? Pour faire de l'argent ? Pour que le curé fasse l'argent ? Faire des condos, vendre le terrain, puis ça serait profitable ici. Imaginez une grosse tour de condo de luxe. Mais avant qu'on touche à ça, il y aura de grandes manifestations et il peut aussi bien avoir du sabotage ou n'importe quoi ».

⁹¹⁴ See interview with Abbé Pierre Gingras by Ryan Lux, 50:00 mins., original: « Et c'est sûr qu'on n'a pas l'habitude de crier la charité sur les toits ».

⁹¹⁵ See interview with Carole Jacques-Savaria by Ryan Lux, July 10, 2020, 11:00 mins., original: « Il y avait beaucoup, beaucoup, de groupes communautaires. Il y avait une vie de bénévoles. Tout le monde se connaissait et, à chaque année, entre 1999 et 2010, il y avait une fête des bénévoles qui se donnait au sous-sol de l'église. Il y avait toute une vie sociale qui se greffait à l'église ».

2. *Metronome of Neighbourhood Life Muted*

Fortin, who lived just behind the church, has noticed wider effects since Saint-Jean-Baptiste closed, outside of the circle of practising Catholics, volunteers, and recipients of charity. From where he stood, the neighbourhood's essence was missing. He explained that

there are businesses that say that since the closure, their business has dropped. It's true that when you come out from Mass, yes, there's a little restaurant there, you have a coffee, or there's a little store opposite, you stroll around the neighbourhood. There was this life that is no longer there on Sunday morning⁹¹⁶.

Philippe Chagnon, another churchwarden, described the same feeling as being as if there were “an empty hole” in the centre of the quarter where before, every Sunday after Mass, there were neighbours chatting on the parvis, filling the streets and sidewalks, “it was a lively neighbourhood. Now there are no lights, and the bells don't ring” he lamented⁹¹⁷. Émond, sitting with me on the parvis, summed up the changes, gesturing to the graffiti-covered church walls under the portico, “There is no community and that fact is painted on the walls, even those of the church”⁹¹⁸.

Once gain, Abbé Gingras agreed, but insisted that he really did try to renew the Parish through pastoral innovation and secular partnerships. Nevertheless, since the closure, he has noticed the same changes as the others: a combination of gentrification, less community warmth, and deepening poverty. While he saw efforts to re-dynamise the neighbourhood, he pointed out that

⁹¹⁶ See interview with Jean-François Fortin by Ryan Lux, July 10, 2020, 10:00 mins., original: « *Il y a les commerces qui disent que, depuis la fermeture, leurs affaires ont baissé. C'est sûr que, quand on sort de la messe, oui, il y a un petit resto là, on va prendre un petit café, où il y a un petit magasin en face, tu vas acheter des petites choses, tu flânes dans le quartier. Il y a quand même cette vie-là qui n'est plus là, le dimanche matin* ».

⁹¹⁷ See interview with Philippe Chagnon by Ryan Lux, July 6, 2020, 22:00 mins., original: « *Les dimanches à 10h30, il y avait des gens qui s'en allaient à l'église, qui marchaient sur les rues, les trottoirs, les gens qui se parlaient sur le parvis de l'église : alors ça faisait un quartier vivant. Maintenant, il n'y a plus de lumière et les cloches ne sonnent pas. Ce qui est plate aussi pour la ville, c'est que les touristes ne viennent plus du Vieux-Québec* ».

⁹¹⁸ See interview with Richard Émond by Ryan Lux, July 11, 2020, 6:00 mins., original: « *C'est parce qu'il n'y a pas de communautaire et s'exprime sur les murs, même sur l'église* ».

this renewal is not bringing people to the church. There is also a large part of Saint-Jean-Baptiste that is still in a fragile financial state. There are many single people or people who do not have a job. And the people who ask most of the Church are those who have the least to give⁹¹⁹.

In other words, the neighbourhood's emerging affluence has aggravated poverty and brought no new revenues to the Parish, which could simply no longer meet the faubourg's social needs as it once had.

3. *Civil Society Response to Closure*

When Abbé Gingras announced Saint-Jean-Baptiste's last Mass, the neighbourhood's civil society immediately threw itself into action and chief amongst its members was Louis Dumoulin, a long-time resident, local organiser, retired architect as well as heritage activist. At 71 years-old⁹²⁰, Dumoulin continued to fight the same battles he first waged when he moved to the neighbourhood in the 1970s to attend Laval University. He met me in the shade of St. Matthew's cemetery, down the street from Saint-Jean-Baptiste towards the old city walls, one of the few green spaces in the neighbourhood and one for which Dumoulin fought tooth and nail beginning in the 1970s into the 1980s. Landing in the neighbourhood by chance from Chicoutimi in the 1970s, Dumoulin was impressed by the zone's history so he quickly joined movements resisting urban renewal projects, popular at the time, which were laying waste to historic urban sectors across the country, especially in poor and dense neighbourhoods like Saint-Jean-Baptiste. His first victory was preventing the

⁹¹⁹ See interview with Abbé Pierre Gingras by Ryan Lux, July 8, 2020, 7:00 mins., original: « *Bien que Saint-Jean-Baptiste, c'est un quartier que se renouvelle, ce renouveau n'apporte pas des gens à l'église. Il y a aussi une grande partie de Saint-Jean-Baptiste qui est encore dans un état financier fragile. On retrouve beaucoup de personnes seules ou des personnes qui n'ont pas de l'emploi. Et les gens qui revendiquent le plus pour l'Église sont ceux qui donnent le moins* ».

⁹²⁰ He was 71 when we met in July 2020.

construction of a 16-storey tower on the site of an old freight depot. “That was the first thing I did as a citizen”, he told me⁹²¹.

One semester, Dumoulin was tasked with taking the dimensions of the sector’s blue-collar housing units for a school project and in so doing found the apartment he instantly knew he would live in one day. Today from that same apartment, Dumoulin can see rue Saint-Jean from up on the hill, where rue Saint-Gabriel runs parallel to Saint-Jean. From his window Dumoulin could see Saint-Jean-Baptiste’s façade and soaring steeple, which dramatically foregrounds the valley below. In fact, when he first got involved with trying to find a solution for the church, Dumoulin recalled saying to Abbé Gingras: “if the church is demolished, I’m going to lose my view”, to which the priest cryptically responded, “I think you will lose much more than that”⁹²².

a) *A History of Neighbourhood Heritage Consciousness*

But before Dumoulin could worry about Saint-Jean-Baptiste, he first worried about the neighbourhood bearing its name’s survival. During the 1970s developers had already destroyed virtually all the neighbouring Faubourg Saint-Louis and were starting to slash their way through the eastern section of Saint-Jean-Baptiste, replacing dense housing with hotels, office buildings, and parking lots. Dumoulin and company managed to hold the line at rue Saint-Joachim, just a few streets from the leafy 19th century Anglican cemetery where all passersby seemed to know his name. He explained his motivation at the time was very simply to keep residents living in the area

⁹²¹ See interview with Louis Dumoulin by Ryan Lux, July 8, 2020, recording 7, 16:30 mins., original: « *La première année où j’habitais ici, c’est juste au coin, il y avait une gare un dépôt d’échange. C’est là où il devrait construire une tour de 16 étages ; donc, j’ai commencé par passer des pétitions, et on a empêché la construction du tour. C’était le premier geste que j’ai fait comme citoyen* ».

⁹²² *Idem.*, recording 7, 24:00 mins., original: « *C’est ce que j’ai dit au curé : s’ils démolissent l’église, je perds mon paysage. Il m’a dit « je pense qu’on perd beaucoup plus que ça* ».

rather than being chased into the suburbs⁹²³. This episode in history is important for Dumoulin to highlight because he insisted that the massive dislocation played a significant role in collapsing religious practice among the sector's parishes, both in terms of dislocating well-established social ties to the parishes as well as instigating demographic decline.

But in the 1980s, emboldened by agreements with governments to cease demolitions, the newly created Saint-Jean-Baptiste Neighbourhood Council formed a heritage committee which sought to restore Saint-Matthew's cemetery, which was in rough shape a few generations after the Anglican exodus from the city.⁹²⁴ Members of the committee wanted to tame the overgrown and dilapidated green space, so it petitioned the City to take action. What the City proposed in response, Dumoulin recalled, was totally unacceptable to the heritage consciousness emerging at the time. He described the project as "the biggest act of vandalism I'd ever seen. It was very, shall we say, 'contemporary'. Their case was paved with good intentions, but I said 'no'"⁹²⁵. The City listened, abandoned its project, and offered the site to the committee to rehabilitate. They canvassed citizens, spoke to experts, and eventually proceeded according to the core principle of restoration without destruction. They installed lighting and benches, restored and mapped the headstones and offered multiple forms of interpretation. The project was a massive success, and the cemetery is one of the neighbourhood's liveliest locations.

⁹²³ *Idem.*, recording 2, 3:00 mins., original: « Pendant les années 70, on a lutté pour sauver la rue Saint-Joachim. Le gouvernement du Québec voulait démolir cette rue pour en construire un boulevard. Notre résistance a empêché la démolition de tout, entre Saint-Gabriel et René Lévesque. On a voulu conserver la rue, on a voulu conserver des bâtiments et surtout les gens, ça aura eu l'effet de chasser les gens hors du centre-ville ».

⁹²⁴ *Le Conseil du quartier comité patrimoine*, formed in 1983.

⁹²⁵ *Idem.*, recording 7, 30:00 mins., original: « La Ville a décidé de procéder avec leur dessein pour le cimetière et c'était le plus gros acte de vandalisme que j'ai jamais vu. C'était très, disons, contemporain. Leur affaire était pavée en bonnes intentions, mais moi, j'ai dit non ».

It was back in 2008 when Dumoulin got involved with the Parish Heritage Committee when he was approached by Dominique Drolet from the *Fonds de solidarité* who was interested in featuring the Parish in his work commemorating the colony's 400th anniversary.

I told him the truth and what I said was exactly what happened. This person initiated a process that I consider completely crazy because to work in heritage and particularly in religious heritage, you must frankly be crazy⁹²⁶.

This led to his participation in the parish heritage committee, the same to which Carole Jacques-Savaria belonged, and to the central grassroots civil society role he ended up playing in terms of fighting for a citizen-led appropriation of the cathedral. “Religious worship is not our department,” said Dumoulin of the secular not-for-profit, *Espace Solidaire*. He created this organisation to work in parallel with the Parish to secure the church's future: “What interests me is the community life and the heritage aspect, one that is nationally recognised for its exceptional status”⁹²⁷.

b) From Serious Intermediary to Afterthought

So naturally, after years of working on the church, when Abbé Gingras announced the imminent closure, Dumoulin was ready to facilitate a collaboration between the civil and political spheres to organise the community around a reappropriation of the church, beginning with a massive public consultation that was supported by local politicians representing all levels of government. Cap-aux-Diamants' ward city councillor Jean Rousseau, the political heir to Anne Guérette, who supported Dumoulin's efforts, had been navigating a political response to the closure since his election in 2017, but when I met him on the church parvis in 2020, he largely expressed frustration

⁹²⁶ *Idem.*, recording 4, 13:00 mins., original: « Je lui ai dit la vérité et ce que j'ai dit, c'était exactement ce qui s'est passé. Cette personne a enclenché un processus que, moi, je juge complètement fou, parce que pour travailler en patrimoine et particulièrement le patrimoine religieux - il faut être franchement fou ».

⁹²⁷ *Idem.*, recording 7, 29:00 mins., original: « L'aspect culte, ce n'est pas notre rayon. On ne s'occupe pas de ça. Ce qui m'intéresse, c'est la vie communautaire et l'aspect patrimonial, et l'aspect patrimonial se reconnaît à l'échelle nationale, donc une reconnaissance du son statut exceptionnel ».

due to his inability to make progress with the ruling municipal party, led by Régis Labeaume, who served as mayor between 2007 and 2021; a period during which there had never been more church demolitions. During his term as councillor, and his subsequent campaign for mayor during the 2021 election, Rousseau explained that he tried to liaise between members of the community, like Dumoulin, and the City, to settle the church's destiny and to return vital services to the quarter's poor, whose lives the closure had most disrupted.

My challenge is to develop a sense of belonging that will allow us to work with community leaders to ensure that we can save this building. As a politician, I have to know when and how to apply political pressure on the municipal government, knowing that it is not only heritage that saves the buildings.⁹²⁸

Rousseau insisted that the apparent ambivalence of the community's reaction to the church's future was not a reflection of their feelings for the church, but to a certain degree, a testament to their serious commitment to it. He described the community's influential citizens as educated, well-travelled, sensitive to heritage considerations, and certainly not naïve. In his talks with leading citizens such as Louis Dumoulin, Rousseau found the community ready to mobilise for the church but only for a serious project with serious commitments. Pointing out that for more than 20 years the neighbourhood never stopped advocating for the church, Rousseau explained that the new challenge was “to have a dialogue with the Parish and that is difficult because they see it as a source of income, whereas we see it differently”⁹²⁹. Rousseau, however, was only the contemporaneous iteration of local political interest in Saint-Jean-Baptiste when I visited in the first weeks of summer 2020. It is instructive to return to the still snowy Quebec City Spring of

⁹²⁸ See interview with Jean Rousseau by Ryan Lux, July 8, 2020, 13:00 mins., original: « *Mais par contre, il y a cette notion de noblesse obligée, la prise en charge par des élites. Je dirais le scénario idéal : c'est de trouver une forme de mécénat privé qui fait finalement le leadership de façon à ce que les différents acteurs puissent travailler ensemble. Il faut que se lève la communauté* ».

⁹²⁹ *Idem.*, 15:00 mins., original: « *Il y avait toujours les gens qui se battent pour conserver ce site; le défi, c'est d'avoir un dialogue avec la fabrique et ça c'est difficile, parce qu'ils y voient une source de revenus, alors que nous nous voyons ça différemment* ».

2015, when Louis Dumoulin was the first among Quebec City civil society to seriously react to the closure of their neighbourhood's grandest building.

It is important to mention here that Dumoulin, who described himself as an “imprinted” as opposed to “believing” Catholic⁹³⁰, had his own social orbit in the Faubourg. He was a member of every popular organisation that counted, and his influence extended from the Parish Heritage Committee to the Neighbourhood Council as well as the People's Council. He was also on a first name basis with most local politicians before they would be elected, such was his hyperlocal stature. So, it should come as no surprise that he assembled representatives from all levels of government to announce what essentially was *his* public consultation on the future of the neighbourhood church: both online and in person. The consultations' success put wind in Dumoulin's sails and by 2018 he was forging partnerships between his not-for-profit, the Parish, the regional tourism board, and a sociologist filmmaker, all of whom were projected to assemble at a 2020 congress dedicated to resolving the problem of Saint-Jean-Baptiste. Steam was building behind the grassroots-originated process as well legitimacy for Dumoulin's *Espace Solidaire* until the pandemic struck, and the secular gains that Dumoulin had been accumulating evaporated. The summer day we spent together was originally meant to have been spent telling hundreds of conference attendees about the church and advocating for its importance to the community and the nation, but alas, due to Covid-19 restrictions, the privilege of hearing about it was mine alone.

c) *The General Public – As Keen as Ever*

Carole Jacques-Savaria met Louis Dumoulin through the Parish Heritage Committee and since the closure had transferred her passion for the church to his secularly oriented *Espace Solidaire*, which

⁹³⁰ *Idem.*, recording 7, 41:30 mins., original: « *J'ai été élevé dans la foi catholique. Je ne pratique pas, je ne pense pas d'être croyant, mais c'est certain que ça a teinté, et teinte encore, ma vision du monde, ma manière d'agir* ».

he created as a civic response to the Parish's cries for help. Even though she was extremely involved in Parish life, her reaction to the closure threw her into action for the church's secular future: "everyone was in shock, but we got moving to try and provoke a government reaction"⁹³¹. In 2019, their group convinced Abbé Gingras to include the church in the city's *Open Doors* activities and the response was humbling for everyone involved. Both Dumoulin and Jacques-Savaria saw their church with new eyes as they watched more than 2,000 people pour into one of the nation's largest 'empty shells', four years since its doors were last open to the public. Dumoulin recalled the day inspiring reflections such as:

Children are always impressed when entering a church. We are used to seeing big buildings, but not big interior volumes. People hear the acoustics. The church is a musical instrument. Churches, in Quebec, are the quintessence of our civilisation; it's where society expresses itself⁹³².

Carole Jacques-Savaria also remembered the same effect. She noticed a quiet befall even the most agnostic visitors at their entrance to Saint-Jean-Baptiste, an effect she credited to the church's sublime design and volumetry. Abbé Pierre Gingras was also present at the 2019 opening and observed, once again, thousands of unfamiliar faces streaming into his church in 2019 and understood the phenomenon as a way for "people to mourn and check in on their church"⁹³³.

d) *Sidelined: casualty of the City – Archdiocese Standoff*

⁹³¹ See interview with Carole Jacques-Savaria by Ryan Lux, July 10, 2020, 6:00 mins., original: *Le choc de la surprise! Le monde était sur choc. Donc, on a commencé à faire des démarches auprès la ville, auprès la ministre de Culture, pour faire quelque chose, d'essayer de provoquer des réflexions pour une autre vocation de l'église, ce n'est pas simple. Moi, j'ai été, à ce moment-là, j'étais dans l'Espace solidaire. On était un groupe qui a travaillé beaucoup sur la vocation culturelle et on est arrivés à un beau projet. Évidemment, comme il y a plusieurs acteurs, ce n'est pas tout de mettre sur papier, c'est une question de comment, puis de faisabilité* ».

⁹³² See interview with Louis Dumoulin by Ryan Lux, July 8, 2020, recording 7, 45:00 mins., original: « *Les enfants sont toujours impressionnés en entrant dans une église. On a l'habitude de voir des grands édifices, mais pas grands à l'intérieur. Et, au niveau d'acoustique, les gens aiment beaucoup notre église, parce qu'on a une très bonne acoustique. L'église en soi, c'est un instrument de musique. Les églises, au Québec, c'est la quintessence de notre civilisation, c'est là où les affaires de société étaient au maximum* ».

⁹³³ See interview with Abbé Pierre Gingras by Ryan Lux, July 8, 2020, 18:00 mins., original: « *Il se présentait quelque 2,000 personnes en quatre heures pour la journée de la culture, les portes ouvertes. Les gens sont venus pour faire leur deuil, les gens se retrouvaient à leur église* ».

Even though Dumoulin had made connections with politicians at all levels of governments and was successfully mobilising secular society to find solutions for Saint-Jean-Baptiste, he said his efforts were met with indifference from the two most important actors: the Archdiocese and the City.

We tried to form a board of directors. But every time something goes wrong. We would have to reassemble our board of directors. But Rémy Gagnon, the person in charge of the parish department, instead of helping us, the Diocese, through Rémy Gagnon, told us that they no longer had confidence in our project. Instead of helping us, instead of supporting us, they were always saying no, no, no, no, we don't like that. Then the City did the same thing⁹³⁴.

In the midst of the pandemic, one last attempt was made to form a board of directors for Solidarity Space and, in Dumoulin's words, "now we no longer exist, we hit another wall and we lost everyone except Dominique Drolet and myself"⁹³⁵, referring to the colleague who first approached him to work at saving Saint-Jean-Baptiste back in 2008. Looking out onto the green oasis that was Saint Matthew's churchyard that day, Dumoulin reflected that "I have much more power here than at Saint-Jean-Baptiste church. At Saint-Jean-Baptiste church, I have no power. If I were a rich donor - and I'm not rich - maybe the Archdiocese would listen to me. Here it belongs to the City"⁹³⁶, governed by the kinds of democratic mechanisms Dumoulin had spent his activist life participating in so enthusiastically.

⁹³⁴ See interview with Louis Dumoulin by Ryan Lux, July 8, 2020, recording 4, 14:00 mins., original: « On a essayé de former un comité d'administration. Mais à chaque fois, il s'est passé quelque chose et il fallait remonter notre conseil d'administration. Mais Rémi Gagnon, le responsable pour le département de la fabrique, au lieu de nous aider, le diocèse, de la bouche de Rémy Gagnon, nous a dit qu'ils n'avaient plus confiance dans votre projet. Au lieu de nous aider, au lieu de nous appuyer, ils étaient toujours en train de dire non, non, non, non, on n'aime pas ça. Puis, la ville faisait la même chose avec nous autres ».

⁹³⁵ *Idem.*, 18 :00 mins., original : « Et maintenant, ça n'existe plus. On a frappé un autre mur et on a perdu tout le monde, sauf Dominique et moi ».

⁹³⁶ *Idem.*, 14 :00 mins., original : « Moi, j'ai beaucoup plus d'emprise ici qu'à l'église Saint-Jean-Baptiste. À l'église Saint-Jean-Baptiste, je n'ai aucun pouvoir. Si j'étais un riche donateur - et je ne suis pas riche - peut-être que l'archidiocèse m'écouterait. Ici, ça appartient à la ville ».

D. Saint-Jean-Baptiste's National Life: Outward Representations

Just as practising Catholics have associations of the church as a secular community space, non-practising Catholics often have national identification with the building as a transcendent social space representing French Canada and its history – a reference which used to harmonise their worldview with their practising compatriots. For Jean-François Fortin and Sébastien Lavoie, churches were the most meaningful forms of contemporary national heritage, even for non-believers, not only because of their beauty, but also in terms of their socio-historic significance for the collectivity. Fortin said that churches, in comparison to civic heritage, like a fire station, were not absolutely essential to physical survival, and thus the fact communities built them anyways, in difficult circumstances, was inherently more meaningful, “they were essential, but not necessary for survival. And so here, the parishes provided a strong nucleus where people could meet and recognise each other, so these buildings are more valuable in that way”⁹³⁷. He distinguished this social memory as an acknowledgement of the sacrifices that bind French-Canadians,

[f]or a long time, the Roman Catholic Church was linked to the survival of the French-Canadian nation, so it was even more urgent for our ancestors to have something beautiful, strong, and solid to represent themselves; this meeting place, compared to the post office, a civil heritage, there is no comparison⁹³⁸.

It is also a heritage that can be found right across the landscape in a concrete and universal fashion.

Citing an oft' used formula, Fortin insisted that,

in Quebec, churches are our chateaux. People from the parish, in any village, gave what was most precious to them: time and know-how. There's an extraordinary memory in these buildings. When this heritage is thrown away at

⁹³⁷ See interview with Jean-François Fortin by Ryan Lux, July 10, 2020, 30:00 mins., original: « *Comparativement aux casernes de pompiers, c'était essentiel, mais pas nécessaire à la survie. Et là, les paroisses donnaient un noyau fort où on se rencontrait, se reconnaissait. Alors, ces bâtiments-là ont plus cette valeur-là* ».

⁹³⁸ *Idem.*, 28 :00 mins., « *Pendant longtemps l'Église catholique romaine était liée à la survie de la nation canadienne-française, alors c'était encore plus prenant pour nos ancêtres d'avoir quelque chose de beau, de fort, de solide pour se représenter. Ce lieu de rencontre, de réunion en comparaison au bureau de poste - un patrimoine civil - c'était incomparable* ».

any time, in any way, we forget what we used to be more and I think that's a shame⁹³⁹.

Increasingly disappearing religious heritage likewise worried Sébastien Lavoie with respect to its role as an important national cultural reference. Perhaps understandably, as a practising Catholic, Lavoie was preoccupied by the important place the Church occupied in the national imaginary. For him, even if it was regrettable that the majority have abandoned religious practice, the need for transcendence could be partially fulfilled by the existence of churches themselves – something he regularly witnessed by the reaction of adolescents upon entering Saint-Jean-Baptiste⁹⁴⁰.

Transcendence aside, Carole Jacques-Savaria explained that French-Canadians made the pilgrimage to Saint-Jean-Baptiste for all kinds of reasons. Often people came looking for a trace of the ancestors, like the Rigali family, who in 2004 gathered from across North America at the church to view an exhibition on their famous sculptor ancestor, Michele Rigali's statuary, which, among other decorations, ornaments the façade of the church, and which was notably the most extensive pantheon in Quebec when it was executed⁹⁴¹. The same was true for people whose ancestors made less notable contributions, such as carpenters and stone masons, who made their anonymous contributions to the monumental church part of family lore. Still others would flock to the church to visit a familiar location from their favourite film. Jacques-Savaria highlighted Alfred

⁹³⁹ *Idem.*, 26 :00 mins., original : « *Les églises sont nos châteaux. Les gens en paroisse, dans n'importe quel village a donné ce qu'ils avaient de plus précieux pour répartir ça, du temps, des savoir-faire. Il y a une mémoire extraordinaire dans ces bâtiments-là. Quand on jette ce patrimoine-là par terre n'importe quand, n'importe comment, on oublie ce qu'on était de plus en plus et je trouve ça dommage* ».

⁹⁴⁰ See interview with Sébastien Lavoie by Ryan Lux, July 10, 2020, 30:00 mins., original: « *Je trouve qu'un peuple qui a perdu sa religion chrétienne comme plus ou moins le peuple d'ici, ça fait un grand trou dans son identité. Pour la beauté des lieux, pour la beauté des bâtiments, on peut s'en inspirer, même si on n'est pas croyant; puis il y a beaucoup de gens qui nous disent : « Même si je ne suis pas croyant, même si je ne vais pas à l'église, je trouve ça très, très, beau ».* Et je dirais que c'est pareil pour la majorité des jeunes qui entrent dans une vieille église comme ça ».

⁹⁴¹ See interview with Carole Jacques-Savaria by Ryan Lux, July 10, 2020, 16:00 mins., original : « *Puis il y a beaucoup de gens qui venaient pour effectuer des recherches sur leurs ancêtres. Par exemple, en 2004, on a fait une exposition sur le sculpteur Rigali et sa famille. On venait de partout pour une journée très spéciale. On a lancé notre exposition et c'était sur leur arrière-grand-père* ».

Hitchcock's 1952 film, *I Confess*, as a particularly important tourist draw; "they are always happy to see that it is still identical to the film"⁹⁴². The point is that the church has cultural significance on a national scale far beyond the borders of the parish or city. The trouble is that it is very expensive for religious tourism to capitalise on that interest so most of the lauded revenues flow to local businesses instead of the maintenance of the site itself⁹⁴³.

So far, the only transformation projects that have been taken seriously have had a national scope. Alongside Louis Dumoulin's *Espace Solidaire* group, whose proposal to create a national genealogical research centre, which received considerable attention from City Hall in the form of feasibility research grants, Mayor Régis Labeaume's pet project for a national traditional arts and trades school attracted the most consideration from the City, the Quebec government, as well as the Archdiocese – from whence the proposal originated. Abbé Gingras explained that, given the disappearance of knowledge and practices of traditional arts and trades.

So, we thought, why not renew this capacity with people who aren't necessarily skilled in higher studies, but who might be really skilled in the trades? And at the same time, we could restore the stained-glass windows with the students who will have learned glassmaking, and we could restore the paintings. Why not do something interesting that we could all benefit from? And the basement would make the perfect workshop to do this, but it was either too simple or too easy⁹⁴⁴.

Others, like city councillor Jean-Jacques Rousseau, who liked the genealogy centre proposal but deemed it not profitable enough, preferred the Porter Commission proposal to use the church

⁹⁴² *Idem.*, 15:00 mins., original: « En 1952 Alfred Hitchcock est venu tourner le film *I confess* à Québec et l'église Saint-Jean-Baptiste faisait l'objet de plusieurs tournages et il y a des gens qui venaient pour voir si l'église avait changé, parce qu'ils avaient vu ce film-là et ils sont toujours heureux de voir que c'est identique ».

⁹⁴³ See Stéphanie Martin, « Tourisme religieux : un bon défi pour le Québec », *Le Soleil*, May 8, 2013, (web) consulted July 19, 2023, <https://www.lesoleil.com/2013/05/08/tourisme-religieux-un-bon-defi-pour-Québec-007c5b7a5bcf3b8a1612e85dd47b81b0/>.

⁹⁴⁴ See interview with Abbé Pierre Gingras by Ryan Lux, July 8, 2020, 41:00 mins., original: « Donc, on s'est dit pourquoi pas renouveler cette capacité des gens qui ne sont pas nécessairement habiles dans les grandes études, mais qui vont être habiles drôlement dans les métiers? Et on pourrait en même temps restaurer les vitraux avec les étudiants qui auront appris le verre et on aurait pu faire restaurer les peintures. Pourquoi ne faire pas quelque chose d'intéressant auquel on pourrait en profiter? Et le sous-sol aurait été l'atelier le plus intéressant pour faire ça, mais c'était trop simple ou trop facile ».

basement to accommodate the overcrowded school next door and to preserve the church nave as an historic national space, though he admitted that putting such a partnership into practice would be jurisdictionally difficult. “A project of this kind still raises the question: who takes on the management? This would be an example of a project where part of the building is used. The nave is extraordinary, a magnificent space, but in this case, it's all about space management. How can we create separations? ⁹⁴⁵. But whatever the solution be, Parish Council secretary Jean-François Fortin was adamant it would be way out of proportion for the Parish to play any significant role. He maintained that, since the State recognised the building as having the highest level of heritage value, a status which prevents major structural changes, like the ones necessary to generate revenue, the solution must come from the Quebec government.

We're prevented from making repairs because it has to be done the way it was done in 1880. I want to, but I don't have the financing. And is the government going to help me? No. They only hand out obligations and there's no help to accompany them. We're a community of 100 to 125 people. We can't maintain a monument like that. We have a legal obligation to maintain it. We have an obligation to keep it in good condition. And when we are no longer able to, what do we do? We don't have an answer.

Besides clergy, parishioners past and present, community organisers, and politicians, the professionals⁹⁴⁶, or institutional civil society had their word to say on Saint-Jean-Baptiste's national qualities, and among these, the overwhelming professions represented were Architecture

⁹⁴⁵ See interview with Jean Rousseau by Ryan Lux, July 8, 2020, 8:00 mins., original: « *Un tel projet se pose encore la question : qui assume la gestion? Ça serait un exemple d'un projet où on utilise une partie de l'édifice. La nef est extraordinaire, un espace magnifique, mais là, on tombe dans une gestion d'espace. Comment peut-on créer des séparations?* »

⁹⁴⁶ I was only lucky enough to interview one architect, but other professions included Art Historians such as Claude Corriveau, who along with photographer Frida Franco published a collection dedicated to the church's heritage called *Inoubliable Saint-Jean-Baptiste*, Quebec City, Septentrion, 2020; as well as sociologist Pierre Fraser who is editor-in-chief of the periodical *Photo/Société*, and who produced a documentary on Saint-Jean-Baptiste called *Requiem pour une église, un retour sur la fermeture de l'église*, 2017; and of course Historians of Architecture Luc Noppen and Lucie K. Morisset who have intervened through countless conferences and publications since 1980, when Noppen held the position of scientific advisor and coordinator for the parish heritage committee.

and History of Architecture. Their register differed from people like Dumoulin's⁹⁴⁷ or Rousseau's who privileged urban appropriation, instead their priority was national. Almost as soon as the church closed, Quebec architects began thinking about how most appropriately to transform the iconic sacred space into a national secular space. In fact, some University of Laval students were tasked with re-imagining the space as their capstone assignment in 2015. They presented their projects to the public at another transformed church down the street – St. Matthew's – where Dumoulin casually pitched the idea to Abbé Gingras of switching places with the former and much smaller Anglican church turned library; move the church into the small library and the library to the much larger church. If only reality were so nimble. The challenge these young architects faced was how to balance Saint-Jean-Baptiste's high national profile appropriately and respectfully with a new secular vocation.

1. On the trouble with exceptionality: or the experts vs. decision-makers'

Gordian knot.

Architect, Jacques Plante, explained to me at his house just a few blocks from Saints-Martyrs-Canadiens, how Saint-Jean-Baptiste's high heritage evaluation posed a problem, even for architects experienced in church transformations. Plante,⁹⁴⁸ an important Quebec City architect and teacher, cited three problems:

The church is very well known. People love it as if it were their own. They don't want anyone to touch it. They're not going to pay, however, and the decor is very, very imposing. So, groups very often want to use it, but they only want to use the basement⁹⁴⁹.

⁹⁴⁷ Although an architect himself, Dumoulin privileges a primarily local function for the church.

⁹⁴⁸ See Normand Provencher, « Décès du réputé architecte Jacques Plante », *La presse*, July 5, 2022, (web) consulted July 19, 2023, <https://www.lapresse.ca/arts/2022-07-05/concepteur-de-plusieurs-edifices-culturels/deces-du-repute-architecte-jacques-plant.php>.

⁹⁴⁹ See interview with Jacques Plante by Ryan Lux, July 10, 2020, 26:00 mins., original: « 1), Elle est très connue. Les gens l'aiment beaucoupm comme si elle leur appartenait. Ils ne veulent pas qu'on la touche; puis 2), Ils ne vont pas payer en tout cas, et 3), Le décor est très, très, présent. Alors, ils veulent très souvent l'utiliser, mais ils veulent utiliser que le sous-sol ».

And though Plante was not directly involved with Saint-Jean-Baptiste, he came to my attention as being the first architect to write into the newspaper following the announcement of the church's closure, in a letter to the editor urging the government to relocate some of the National Archives to the site⁹⁵⁰. But you can be sure that the Laval University Architecture professor and participant in some 37 Quebec City buildings followed the case closely. Besides, he would have known what he was talking about, given he submitted proposals for multiple church conversions, including Saint-Coeur-de Marie on the Grande-Allée, the nearby Franciscan Convent's chapel in Quebec, as well as Saint-Sauveur in Montreal, not to mention designing many heritage transformations, including the Théâtre Diamant in Quebec City. Plante also authored a book on cultural transformations of heritage buildings.

Through his participation and observation of these cases, he observed how the expense and sensitivities of transformation often lead to demolition. Both Quebec City churches he drafted proposals for were demolished and transformed into luxury condos and the Montreal Church was semi-demolished and integrated into the new Montreal Hospital⁹⁵¹. Saint-Jean-Baptiste, however, stands apart from the other churches he had worked on for a number of reasons.

So, it's a bit frustrating to work with a church because it's always too expensive. In Sainte-Foy, the Saint-Denys-du-Plateau Church... it's a church that was part of the 60s' religious revival, with its new, sleek, modern architecture. The architecture is quite spectacular. It was abandoned and the church was rebuilt as a library, which works very, very well. It has an interesting volumetry and very sober decor. The decor was lighter, so it worked very well. And so, there are

⁹⁵⁰ See Jacques Plante, « Le phare de Saint-Jean-Baptiste s'éteint », *Le Soleil*, February 24, 2015, p. 25.

⁹⁵¹ See interview with Jacques Plante by Ryan Lux, July 10, 2020, 8:00 mins., original: « *J'ai plus fait des interventions pour Saint-Cœur de Marie. Moi, j'ai fait des analyses pour faire un théâtre à l'intérieur vers 1999, le théâtre la Bordée. Donc, j'ai fait une étude pour la transformer en théâtre, mais ça coûtait trop cher de rénover l'enveloppe, même avant de mettre quelque chose à l'intérieur. Une autre église que j'ai analysée, c'était la chapelle des Franciscaines de Québec, qui est maintenant démolie - juste à l'autre côté de la rue de Sainte-Cœur-de-Marie; maintenant, c'est des condos. L'extérieur était plutôt ordinaire, mais elle avait un intérieur assez intéressant. Je travaillais aussi sur l'église Saint-Sauveur qui a été démolie. Plusieurs églises sur lesquelles je travaillais ont été démolies. J'ai travaillé à Montréal sur une autre église, Saint-Sauveur, pour en faire un spa avec une grille à la place de l'autel et finalement, ça ne s'est pas fait et ç'a été exproprié; le clocher a été reconstruit et on avait intégré l'espace dans le nouvel hôpital de Montréal* ».

churches that are much more easily appropriated, and the more appropriable they are, the more they can be transformed.

Unlike Saint-Denys-du-Plateau, Saint-Jean-Baptiste posed more heritage problems due to age and decoration, but also other less obvious factors. Plante noted that the church's orientation is unusual in that it runs parallel to the street, especially a main street. Moreover, its location on the edge of a major hill, which makes it possible for the basement to be of unusually attractive dimensions. These qualities all increase Saint-Jean-Baptiste's heritage value and thus make significant transformation nearly impossible.

One of the major obstacles for Saint-Jean-Baptiste's transformation are the radically different roles of the down and upstairs, which, Plante acknowledged, worked well in the context of a parish, but would be "very hard to restore, to put something in it without totally breaking it"⁹⁵².

In contrast to Saint-Jean-Baptiste, Saint-Coeur-de-Marie could have been relatively easy to transform even with its high heritage score. For example, Plante explained that whether or not a church could find a new vocation depended on a), its location, b), its relationship to surrounding built heritage, c), quality of space, and e), rarity of its architectural style. Another of the Parish's churches, which, according to Plante, could have been easily transformed, was Saint-Dominique given its relatively simple and unadorned interior. He envisioned it one day becoming an annexe for the National Art Gallery located next door and which already purchased and demolished the monastery to expand their galleries⁹⁵³. But for Saint-Jean-Baptiste, its sumptuous and rare

⁹⁵² *Idem.*, 6:00 mins., original: « C'est quand même une église un peu particulière, parce qu'elle est située le long de rue commerçante. Souvent, le contexte des églises, c'est résidentiel, où il n'y a rien autour, mais là, c'est vraiment sur la rue du quartier. C'est aussi dans un contexte un peu différent parce qu'à cause du cap, le sous-sol devient utilisable, avec la pente du terrain, alors ça, c'est déjà un élément intéressant. Mais c'est très difficile à restaurer, de mettre quelque chose dans l'intérieur sans tout briser ».

⁹⁵³ *Idem.*, 3:00 mins., original: « Une, c'est l'église Sainte-Cœur-de-Marie sur la Grande-Allée, et elle, on aurait dû la sauvegarder, c'était vraiment exceptionnel, c'était vraiment extraordinaire. La qualité de l'espace, la qualité de

historical interior poses a major problem for any future use as the major religious elements, which give it heritage value but also restrict what can be meaningfully altered. Respecting heritage elements simply does not pay⁹⁵⁴. But why should governments, the Church, and civil society ever expect that these sites be economically self-sufficient, or even more, delusionally profitable, in the first place?

Aside from Saint-Jean-Baptiste's particular challenges, Plante explained how restoring or transforming churches is, in general, more demanding than other kinds of projects. He cited regulatory problems which generally only protect the church's exterior envelopes, leaving interiors vulnerable to damage. Even with that support, Plante detailed how even just external maintenance could be prohibitively expensive for reasons of neglect, and poor original construction aggravated by contractors cutting corners to save costs. All that is to say that, before communities can even decide on an interior function, most renovation projects automatically require the massive expense of replacing steel roofs, restoring masonry, and stabilising leaning steeples and towers⁹⁵⁵.

Richard Émond did not see any incompatibility with keeping the nave intact, returning the basement to the community and introducing a new vocation, pointing out that Saint-Matthew's Anglican church, which now houses a public library, retained virtually all of its sacred decorations. When we spoke during the down pour, his feelings for the national importance of Quebec's

l'architecture, c'est ça un peu ce qui fait si on garde ou non une église. Son emplacement dans le paysage architectural et le style architectural qui est très important - le style byzantin à Québec, c'est une rarissime, même à Montréal, il n'y a pas beaucoup. Et puis, il y a aussi son potentiel à transformation. Il y a des églises dont le décor architectural est très flamboyant, très important, il est très présent. Par exemple, l'église Saint-Dominique, qui est très sobre, donc c'est très facile à transformer Saint-Dominique et puis faire une annexe du musée, pour faire une exposition sur l'art religieux, par exemple ».

⁹⁵⁴ *Idem.*, 4:00 mins., original: « Mais pour d'autres églises, le décor est trop imposant, comme à Saint-Jean-Baptiste. C'est parce que le décor est très imposant que c'est vraiment difficile à jouer avec ça, sans l'abîmer, sans la détruire peut-être, ou faire que les nouveaux usages viennent endommager le décor ».

⁹⁵⁵ *Idem.*, 5:00 mins., original: « Le problème c'est que la majorité des églises ont été mal construites. Elles ont été construites souvent par des entrepreneurs qui ont mis moins de matériaux, de matériaux de moindre qualité, pour en profiter, et donc aujourd'hui la problématique, c'est l'enveloppe du bâtiment. La maçonnerie est en mauvaise condition; la toiture est en mauvaise condition. Il faut refaire tous les éléments métaux à l'extérieur. Les clochers penchent ; donc, c'est très coûteux de restaurer l'enveloppe même, avant mettre une fonction intérieure ».

religious history were on the same register as his feelings for Saint-Jean-Baptiste the church, “It’s killing the history of Quebec, it’s killing a history. We have a history here, and just because people don’t want to go to church anymore doesn’t mean we should destroy it. We need to restore it. Why destroy in order to rebuild? [like Place Royale]. Why not restore what’s already standing?”⁹⁵⁶.

2. *National allure, local funds: an incongruent religious heritage regulatory framework*

Saint-Jean-Baptiste’s problems were not only architectural and historical in origin; they were also rooted in a Kafkaesque system of grants and subsidies, the criteria for which were ill suited to the scale of Saint-Jean-Baptiste’s obstacles, but designed, instead, to realistically sustain smaller, modernist, suburban churches. The best way to visualise the dilemma facing Saint-Jean-Baptiste is to imagine 300 to 400 people peppered throughout the immense 2,500-person capacity nave on Sunday mornings. A gathering this size would be considered a success in most other Quebec Churches, but even if the congregation were rich, which it was not, the immense scale of the disproportion would make balancing the budget impossible.

Logically, it would make sense for the City or Quebec government to step in as they have already devoted tens of millions to the church since the 1970s, but in order for the Church to access religious heritage grants, it must remain an operational parish which uses the church for religious practice, but for it to attract municipal government grants, it needed to first roll the dice of desacralising, than paying full municipal taxes on a priceless site until they could find a buyer who would be legally prohibited from changing his new property in any substantial way. What’s more, explained City councillor for Saint-Jean-Baptiste’s ward Jean Rousseau, is that 20-30 per cent of

⁹⁵⁶ See interview with Richard Émond by Ryan Lux, July 11, 2020, 17:00 mins., original: « *C’est tuer l’histoire du Québec, c’est tuer une histoire. On a une histoire ici et ce n’est pas parce que les gens ne veulent plus aller à l’église qu’il faut la détruire. Il faut la restaurer. Pourquoi détruire pour reconstruire? Pourquoi pas restaurer ce qui est déjà debout?* »

any capital project must come from the Parish in order to qualify for the substantial grants. The dilemma, as Rousseau saw it, was that the Parish could not afford to make renovations to accommodate new revenue-generating streams, and tenants or user groups would never invest millions of dollars in a building they rent, and if the building did sell, the new owner would automatically be responsible for the necessary repairs to the tune of, at a minimum, \$7 million. It is this dynamic that Rousseau blamed for having stalled progress.

The challenge is that we don't yet have a management model for such a building. The model we have is that of the owner. As an owner, you can do what you want. But on the other hand, with a heritage building, you can't exactly do as you please. So, we raised the notion of a trust⁹⁵⁷.

Jean-François Fortin, who had witnessed multiple project proposal cycles as parish secretary, failed one after the other, explained that the problem was not only the system, but the responsibility of those who operated it. Based on his experience, he had the impression that there was simply a lack of will to finance any project proposed by the Parish or the community.

I think we've been taken for a ride by the government. My God, just tell us "No, we're not going to fund that". But no one in the government is going to say that. So, instead the civil servants will say, "That's a good idea. Come up with a proposal. Show us the financing model".

Ministry of Culture staff specifically were guilty of this opaqueness.

We'd propose it to the government, and after two or three years, the senior civil servants change chairs, and then those who knew about it, or were pushing it moving forward, gave it back to you and you start to learn to have to re-inspire someone new to take it on⁹⁵⁸.

⁹⁵⁷ See interview with Jean Rousseau by Ryan Lux, July 8, 2020, 7:00 mins., original: « *Le défi, c'est qu'on n'a pas un mode de gestion pour gérer un tel bâtiment. Le modèle que nous avons, c'est celui de propriétaire. En tant que propriétaire, on fait ce qu'on veut. En revanche, avec un édifice patrimonial, on ne peut pas faire ce qu'on veut. Alors, on a parlé de la notion de fiducie* ».

⁹⁵⁸ See interview with Jean-François Fortin by Ryan Lux, July 10, 2020, 8:00 mins., original: « *Je pense qu'on s'est fait un peu niaiser par le gouvernement. Mon Dieu, dites-nous 'non, on ne financera pas ça!'. Il n'y a personne au gouvernement qui va dire ça. Alors, les fonctionnaires vont dire 'c'est une bonne idée. Montez-nous un projet.*

Fortin blamed this absurdism for exhausting parishioners and volunteers from civil society, who have been grinding the bureaucratic gears since 1995. As soon as some progress would be made, a new government would be elected with its own new philosophy of religious heritage and because of the project's high-profile, as a flagship case, it would need to be totally re-justified according to constantly shifting priorities, including identity, economic, or artistic dimensions. Nationalistic governments obviously invested heavily in identity discourse, while their globalist counterparts preferred the language of tourism and economic development.

Aside from the regulatory and political structures blocking a project for Saint-Jean-Baptiste, the most important was probably the dissonance between heritage status and heritage funding. It is possible in Quebec for the government to designate national heritage status on a building, technically banning demolition and preventing significant changes, without offering any financial support. While, in practice, most churches will receive some kind of heritage funding for major capital projects, the system is piecemeal and not guaranteed in a way that permits long-term planning. Architect Jacques Plante called the system “ridiculous and regularly flouted”, a common practice where a protected church cannot be demolished, so they are abandoned, inhabited by squatters, and left to rot beyond the point of no return, when it can finally be demolished and replaced by condos. “We class them to ease our conscience, to appease people, and all that. And then it's like oh what a shame! And yet, it's been 10 years since the roof broke and there's a mountain of ice in the church. That's what happened to Saint-Coeur-de-Marie”⁹⁵⁹.

Montrez-nous le diagramme de financement'. On va cheminer ça à travers le gouvernement et, après deux ans, trois ans, les hauts fonctionnaires changent de chaises, celui qui était au courant et qui avançait le dossier vous le redonne au complet ».

⁹⁵⁹ See interview with Jacques Plante by Ryan Lux, July 10, 2020, 40:00 mins., original: « On les classe pour se donner une bonne conscience, pour apaiser du monde, tout ça. Et puis après c'est comme : « Oh quel dommage! ». Pourtant, ça fait 10 ans que le toit est percé et qu'il y a une montagne de glace dans l'église. C'est ce qui est arrivé à l'église Saint-Cœur-de-Marie ».

On this point, everyone I spoke with agreed⁹⁶⁰. Gingras put it succinctly when he explained how the current system was actually costing Quebeckers more and achieving less:

If you want to preserve an historic monument, you have to invest everything that goes into it, and budget allocations don't come all at once. In other words, Saint Jean-Baptiste needs \$10 to \$11 million to repair, but the government won't give \$10 to \$11 million to make it brand new. In fact, we never finish repairing it, so it ends up costing more⁹⁶¹.

The Church as well as the government must have known they were in the midst of establishing a future national precedent for how to deal with the upcoming wave of closures. It did not want to set an expensive example as more and more historically and architecturally significant churches close, such as the Nation's triumphant basilicas.

E. A Precedent of National Proportions: The Question of Second Sons

Most of Québec's 19 cathedrals will likely survive the current socio-religious configurational shift from a public to private religion, as demonstrated by the case of Rimouski's Saint-Germain but it is far from certain if they will still belong to the Church in 25 years, or whether indeed they should. More pressing is the problem of the many dozens of historically and architecturally significant non-cathedral basilicas built in the late 19th century to service Quebec's rapidly growing population and clerico-nationalism, which anticipated continuous exponential growth, which poses the present problem. They are generally enormous, like Saint-Jean-Baptiste, and their needs duplicate the expenses of cities' cathedrals without the same ecclesiastical necessity. Meanwhile, de-densifying urban neighbourhoods and secularisation means that generally one traditional religious space suffices per medium-sized cities or metropolitan

⁹⁶⁰ Note that no one from the City's governing party led by Régis Labeaume, the Ministry of Culture, nor the Religious Heritage Council agreed to speak with me with respect to Saint-Jean-Baptiste.

⁹⁶¹ See interview with Abbé Pierre Gingras by Ryan Lux, 5:00 mins., original: « *Si vous voulez conserver un monument historique, il faut investir tout ce qu'il comporte et les enveloppes budgétaires n'arrivent pas d'un seul coup, c'est donner un peu à la pièce. C'est-à-dire Saint Jean-Baptiste, demande 10 à 11 millions de dollars de réparation, mais le gouvernement ne donne pas 10 à 11 millions de dollars pour le refaire à neuf. En fait, on ne finit jamais finalement de réparer, et donc, ça coûte de plus en plus cher* ».

neighbourhood, like Saint-Jean-Baptiste. Majestic second churches represent a period of robust national confidence as well as political and economic recovery from the Conquest. Sometimes, as is the case in many dioceses, these basilicas are the oldest churches, leaving them as the sole links to a specific period of National effervescence. Closing them also sets a precedent for the Church in that their closures represent a first step in privatising the Quebec Church. These churches are often at capacity on Christmas and Easter, or moments of national celebration or sorrow, but rarely otherwise. While it was easier to justify closing underused modern churches without compromising the Church's public status, closing a church like Saint-Jean-Baptiste, or Saint-Charles-de-Limoilou, or Saint-Sauveur for that matter, indelibly mark a transition from one socio-religious configuration to another, and require extremely sensitive transformations on both the cultural and heritage conservation levels.

These churches are beyond the scope of their parishes' ability to maintain and cannot be assumed by most municipalities or civil society organisations, in any case, not in any kind of quantity, because of their extremely high heritage value. Both the Church and various levels of government have recognised this dilemma and reached a stalemate in 2019; both are painfully cautious about what any bold decision on Saint-Jean-Baptiste could mean for the Diocese, City, Church and Quebec State. Ultimately, any project will require all four parties' collaboration.

1. From a Public to Private Church: An Institutional Precedent

A public religion is one that straddles spiritual and civil functions by providing a symbolic social reference, and serving as a social glue, as an intermediary institution between the People and the State. In contrast, a private religion is congregational and clientelist, which concerns itself with the wellbeing of its members and generally a counter-cultural posture. During the last three decades, practising Catholics and clergy have become increasingly disillusioned with and

accustomed to the wider public's ambivalence and have since 1998 been trying to transform their relationship with the non-practising (lapsed, indifferent, disaffiliated: for parishes, these terms are often synonymous) public. Specifically, the Church has been trying to gradually diminish the public's expectations of the Church and devote resources towards practising members' needs. For example, closing a massive historical monument and social resource centre, which cost exceptional sums of money from observant Catholics, whose priorities lay elsewhere.

a) *Laying the groundwork: fusions and closures*

So, first and foremost, religious practices have changed radically since churches like Saint-Jean-Baptiste were built, and especially since the cultural transformation, called the Quiet Revolution, a change in mentalities which initiated the decline of religious practice in Québec. One should remember, however, that going from 80 per cent of residents attending weekly Mass in 1960 to five per cent today meant that during the 1970s churches were still busy compared to most other societies. Abbé Gingras recalled that when he was at the Quebec Seminary at the beginning of the 1970s, both Saint-Jean-Baptiste and Saints-Martyrs-Canadiens were both full; there were still four Masses said per day and eight on the weekends⁹⁶². Imagine that?

Jacques Plante, whose partner attended Saints-Martyrs-Canadiens, blamed anonymity for being partly responsible for contemporary religious transformations. "Even churchgoers are not at all attached to parishes; parish membership no longer exists. What counts is going to church, period"⁹⁶³. This makes it difficult to justify retaining churches for community reasons. Carole

⁹⁶² See interview with Abbé Pierre Gingras by Ryan Lux, July 8, 2020, 1 :00 min., original : « *L'église Saint-Jean-Baptiste, depuis les années 70s, a vécu une diminution de la pratique dominicale. Au début des années 70, c'était encore très bon. Quand je suis rentré au grand séminaire dans les années 1970s, ici à Saints-Martyrs-Canadiens, il y avait encore quatre messes par jour, les fins de semaine, il y en avait huit, puis il y a eu une vague de déclin* ».

⁹⁶³ See interview with Jacques Plante by Ryan Lux, July 10, 2020, 25:00 mins., original: « *Même les pratiquants ne sont pas du tout attachés aux paroisses; l'appartenance paroissiale n'existe plus. Ce qui compte, c'est d'aller à l'église, point* ».

Jacques-Savaria said she thinks overall, people were still generally religious, but that attending Mass might not figure into some people's needs. She cited, for example, her own children who continue to consider themselves believing Catholics, but who do not practise their faith the same way she does. "If I look at my own children, my daughter got married in the church, so I can't say she practices, but the fundamentals remain ... so I think people believe in their own way"⁹⁶⁴. As a result, Jacques-Savaria acknowledged that certain churches would need to close, meanwhile, she is also doubtful that the Quebec Church is on the verge of disappearance. With her participation in *Espace Solidaire*, Jacques-Savaria was hoping to find a new primary vocation for Saint-Jean-Baptiste but ideally, she would have liked to keep the church sacralised in order to host important annual Masses and for sacraments⁹⁶⁵. But even if Jacques-Savaria did not see a primarily religious future for Saint-Jean-Baptiste, she said, "you have to have a holistic view of what it could become, not demolish it, you have to be creative. You have to keep what's beautiful and be able to have a vision of society"⁹⁶⁶. Philippe Chagnon agreed. As a former churchwarden responsible for finance, he knew that Saint-Jean-Baptiste had no future as a parish church. He told me, "[I] t's important to accept that we can't keep everything. The most beautiful pieces we must keep, because the goal is always to preserve what's beautiful. Even if there's no longer worship. The architectural heritage is important to keep, but you can't keep everything"⁹⁶⁷. Abbé Gingras agreed that the Church had

⁹⁶⁴ See interview with Carole Jacques-Savaria, July 10, 2020, 37:00 mins., original: « *Si je regarde mes enfants à moi, ma fille s'est mariée à l'église, je ne peux pas dire qu'elle pratique, mais les fondements restent, donc je pense que les gens croient à leur façon* ».

⁹⁶⁵ *Idem.*, 36:00 mins., original: « *En fermant l'église déjà depuis quelques années, on peut penser qu'il va avoir de moins en moins de gens qui vont se rendre pour le culte, mais moi, je garderai quelques journées spéciales, comme la Saint-Jean-Baptiste et la messe de minuit* ».

⁹⁶⁶ *Idem.*, 45 :00 mins., original: « *Il faut avoir une vue globale de ce que ça pourrait devenir, ne pas démolir, il faut être créatif. Il faut garder ce qu'on a de beau, être capable d'avoir une vision de société* ».

⁹⁶⁷ See interview with Philippe Chagnon by Ryan Lux, July 6, 2020, 37:00 mins., original: « *D'abord, c'est important d'accepter qu'on ne puisse pas tout garder. Les plus belles pièces, ça nous incombe de les garder parce que le but c'est toujours de sauvegarder ce qui est agréable - même s'il n'y a plus de culte. Le patrimoine architectural est important à garder, mais on ne peut pas tout garder* ».

no choice but to adapt to the City's changing religious landscape, which is increasingly plural – although in no way to the extent of other North American metropolises. He said that for the Church, what is essential is to maintain the churches necessary to assemble its community, which is a painful reality⁹⁶⁸.

“So, we made the transition from worship to culture”, said Gingras, who had participated in numerous church closures, I’m kind of used to it by now”⁹⁶⁹. In his experience, the transition of churches from the religious to civil realm goes more smoothly when they take place where there is “community solidity”, citing the example of Saint-Eugène which became a community centre in the late 1990s when Vanier was its own municipality.

I remember the day the bells rang the last time. The mayor came with the councillors to see the bells come down from the steeple. Mayor [Louis] Cardinal's concern at the time was to save what people had invested in building a church so that it could remain for the good of the community. So, we simply made the transition from a religious service to a more civil one. So here we're fighting for the same thing, but there's no relief⁹⁷⁰.

After consecutive dramas of first fusion, then closure, parish council secretary Jean-François Fortin explained there was finally a time for self-reflection. “We've taken a big exhale and now we're just catching our breath, then seeing: where are we? Where are we going?”⁹⁷¹. Passions calmed and as Abbé Gingras had expected, the religious fervour expressed after his closure

⁹⁶⁸ See interview with Abbé Pierre Gingras by Ryan Lux, July 8, 2020, 32:00 mins., original: « *Avec l'arrivée assez surprenante des nombreux musulmans, ça change le visage. Bon, les gens ont pris un recul vis-à-vis la religion et pas juste la chrétienté, mais c'est clair qu'on ne pourra pas conserver tous les lieux de culte, ce qui fait qu'on garde ce qui nous est nécessaire pour rassembler la communauté et imposer par le fait même des choix qui vont être douloureux, mais devant lesquels on est placé* ».

⁹⁶⁹ *Idem.*, 29:00 mins., original: « *Alors, on a fait le passage entre le culte et la culture. À la suite, j'ai fait la fusion avec Saint-Eugène-de-Vanier et la fermeture de Saint-Eugène aussi, alors je suis un peu habitué* ».

⁹⁷⁰ *Idem.*, 37:00 mins., original: « *Moi, je me souviens le jour où les cloches ont sonné pour la dernière fois. Le maire est venu avec les conseillers pour voir descendre les cloches du clocher. La préoccupation du maire Cardinal [de Vanier] dans ce temps-là, c'était de sauver ce que les gens avaient investi pour bâtir une église, pour que ça puisse rester pour le bien de la communauté. Alors on a fait simplement un passage d'un service religieux à un service plutôt civil. Alors qu'ici, on se bat pour la même chose, mais il n'y a pas de relais* ».

⁹⁷¹ See interview with Jean-François Fortin by Ryan Lux, July 10, 2020, 43 :00 mins., original « *On a eu une grande expiration et on est juste en train de reprendre notre souffle, puis de voir où on est. Où est-ce qu'on s'en va?* ».

announcement and at the last Mass subsided. He explained how, for him, this process had manifested an inner conflict shared by most Quebeckers towards their Church.

This is a story of love and hate for the church. The Church is part of our history; it's part of our landscape; but at the same time, we're always in conflict - an inner conflict. So, people criticise, and when you do something, everyone reacts, but it's a reaction like any other: you end up moving on to something else. The first year, it wasn't out of the question to re-open⁹⁷².

So even if the closure was anticipated, Gingras was counting on shocking the secular world into action and to send a signal that the contemporary Catholic Church could no longer shoulder a national institution on its own and that his parish specifically was no longer interested or capable of running Saint-Jean-Baptiste which overwhelmingly functioned as a civic centre subsidising the municipality. But even if the activity inside the church was mostly secular, it would be impossible to subsume the religious qualities of its exterior, which flamboyantly celebrates Quebecker artistry, craftsmanship and the temporal power of its Nation expressed the Church as an institution. Its sublime Catholic architecture and the pre-Vatican II's preponderant place in the national imaginary meant that the church possessed, in spades, a quality first identified by Rudolf Otto: "numinosity"⁹⁷³, an important condition for Traditional Catholics. Fortin described the church's effect as visceral; "And even if people aren't from the neighbourhood, even if they're tourists, when they enter the church, everyone says, "wow! What a place!"⁹⁷⁴.

⁹⁷² See interview with Abbé Pierre Gingras by Ryan Lux, July 8, 13:00 mins., original: « *On a ici une histoire d'amour et haine envers l'Église. L'Église fait partie de notre histoire; elle fait partie de notre paysage; mais, en même temps on est toujours en conflit - un conflit intérieur. Alors ça fait que les gens critiquent et, quand on pose un geste, tout le monde réagit, mais c'est une réaction comme toutes les réactions : on finit par passer à autre chose. La première année, ce n'était pas exclu à rouvrir* ».

⁹⁷³ See Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, translated by John W. Harvey, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1923.

⁹⁷⁴ See interview with Jean-François Fortin by Ryan Lux, July 10, 2020, 31:00 mins., original: « *Et même si les gens ne viennent pas du quartier, même s'ils sont touristes, quand ils entrent l'église, tout le monde dit « waouh! Quel endroit! »* ».

The real victims of the Church's privatisation are casual practitioners, mostly traditionalist in orientation, for whom old churches remain incredibly symbolically charged and culturally evocative. The continued presence of these old majestic churches is psychologically comforting for people like Émond and his religious but non-assiduously practising colleagues downstairs. These are the types of people that always give the church a look over, up and down, as they walk by, perhaps reassured by its audaciousness. The kind of person that goes to Mass, sits by themselves, does not participate otherwise in parish life – the consumer. They consume signification from religious architecture in passive but powerful ways, which are hard to measure for sociology. Based on my interviews, the continued presence of the church's exterior is a source of unanimity across all types, which must reflect their continued strong symbolic resonance of the national reference. Once these churches disappear, so will many vestiges of Catholicism that continue to influence Quebec spirits. In other words, the only reason they continue to identify with the contemporary institution is because of their church, the Church is a corollary. "I received a letter for the tithe for Saint-Jean-Baptiste parish. I wrote back to tell them that the parish of Saint-Jean-Baptiste no longer exists. Why should I give you the money to subsidise another church? No! No! And many people, I'm sure, put it right into the recycling bin too"⁹⁷⁵. I suspect that his attitude, that the architecture is more significant when the building remains a Catholic church is widespread given that I have yet to encounter opposition to the State's religious heritage funding in newspapers or from any political party. The novel development in the case of Saint-Jean-Baptiste is that there is almost no amount of funding that would interest the Parish to retain the behemoth. The public religious and social circumstances and functions it was built to address are simply extinct.

⁹⁷⁵ See interview with Richard Émond by Ryan Lux, July 11, 2020, 6:00 mins., original: « *J'ai reçu une lettre, comme ils l'appellent la capitation, pour la paroisse Saint-Jean-Baptiste. Je leur ai réécrit que la paroisse de Saint-Jean-Baptiste n'existe plus, « pourquoi je vous donnerai l'argent pour subventionner une autre église? » Non! Et beaucoup de personnes, je suis sûr et certain, l'ont mis au recyclage* ».

b) *Cutting the Chaff: Cultural Transformation From Practice to Loyal Catholic*

Some Catholics mean more to the Church than others, and for good reason: the Church owes itself to the people who acknowledge its value, contribute to it financially, and participate in its life in myriad ways. Though it once presided over all of French Canada, and at certain points many Quebeckers still expect it to, the Church still engages with almost a million people most weeks if we assume 10 per cent of Québécois practice their religion at least once a month, belong to a Catholic organisation, or use its many services⁹⁷⁶. Many of these practising Catholics are tired of watering down their beliefs to appeal to a wider public only to gain, in return, the obligation of paying for the cumbersome public role of the Church.

Sebastien Lavoie, the sexton, understood diminished religious practice as a global phenomenon, and saw a silver-lining in the change.

You must face the music, so yes, there are fewer believers. I think young people are influenced in a slightly different way, a different religiosity, different vocations. So, I think we must do church differently. Maybe it'll be small cells with a more concentrated faith, a more concentrated practice, and maybe more scattered. Maybe quantity is a bit scattered, but we need to focus on quality, which is stronger.⁹⁷⁷

Lavoie's views are exemplary of modernist or Vatican II Catholics' discourses of retreat. The disbelief of the new configuration has long passed. Now, even the most optimistic clergy, who were ordained during Vatican II's high hopes for renewal, admit a certain defeat *vis-à-vis*

⁹⁷⁶ See Sarah Wilkins-Laflamme, « Les Religions au Canada: bref portrait statistique », December 2014, (web), consulted 13 January 2019, <https://www.ceetum.umontreal.ca/fileadmin/documents/capsules/2014/wilk-fr-2014.pdf>.

⁹⁷⁷ See interview with Sébastien Lavoie by Ryan Lux, July 10, 2020, 15:00 mins., original: « *Il faut faire face à la musique, alors oui, les croyants sont moins nombreux. Je pense que les jeunes sont influencés d'une façon un peu différente, une religiosité différente, de vocations différentes. Alors, je pense qu'on doit faire l'église différemment. Peut-être que ça sera des petites cellules, avec une foi plus concentrée, une pratique plus concentrée, et peut-être plus éparpillée. Peut-être que la quantité, c'est un peu dispersé, mais il faut qu'on se concentre sur la qualité qui est plus forte* ».

rekindling their influence over public culture. Abbé Gingras preferred to express his experience of the situation, which he called “de-christianisation”, into historical context.

We've moved on to a de-Christianising world. It's part of history. When you consider that Africa, in the time of Saint Augustine, was almost entirely Christian, then Africa became de-Christianised, then Europe became de-Christianised, then America became de-Christianised. It's a bit like that, and it's never pleasant to live during that period. But we'll have, I'd say, a community of true Christians, who aren't there for appearances, but who are there for reality, and that's a consolation.⁹⁷⁸

Besides the consolation of authenticity, Abbé Gingras had some theories about the Church's rightward or dogmatic drift or what others he called “entrenchment”. Although he recognised the benefits of a stronger influence on a smaller population, Abbé Gingras offered a frank assessment of how this dynamic can stifle the very authentic experience people seek.

When there's a period of fear or instability, of course we always try to go back to the right, to things that are well settled. Because they've been settled, we don't ask questions. When you go to school, you don't ask questions. You have to line up. We go to our desks. We always do the same thing, so that's reassuring. But when you give people a bit of freedom, things can go off in all directions. That's more worrying. So, we batten down the hatches and make ourselves comfortable. Which is always a bit dangerous because all creativity and evangelisation is about freedom. Today we've fallen into a kind of silence. We've been told so much. We were everywhere, it was like being everything, then all of a sudden there was an entrenchment that we didn't want to leave, even though it's important to leave⁹⁷⁹.

⁹⁷⁸ See interview with Abbé Pierre Gingras by Ryan Lux, July 8, 33:00 mins., original: « *C'est qu'on est passé à un monde qui se déchristianise. Ça fait partie de l'histoire. Quand on sait que l'Afrique, au temps de Saint Augustin, était presque tout chrétien, puis l'Afrique s'est déchristianisée, puis l'Europe s'est déchristianisée, puis l'Amérique s'est déchristianisée. Ça tourne un peu comme ça et ce n'est jamais agréable de vivre pendant cette période-là. Mais on aura, je dirais, une communauté des chrétiens vrais, qui ne sont pas là pour l'apparence, mais qui sont là pour la réalité et ça, c'est une consolation* ».

⁹⁷⁹ *Idem.*, 63:00 mins., original: « *Quand il y a une période de crainte ou d'instabilité, c'est sûr qu'on cherche toujours à revenir au droit, aux choses bien réglées parce que ça s'est réglé, on ne se pose pas des questions. Quand on rentre à l'école, on ne se pose pas des questions. On doit entrer en rang. On va prendre notre bureau. On fait toujours la même chose, alors ça, c'est rassurant. Alors, quand on laisse un peu la liberté, ça peut partir dans tous les sens. C'est plus inquiétant. Bien on se referme et on se rend confortable. Ce qui est toujours un peu dangereux parce que toute la créativité et l'évangélisation portent sur liberté. Aujourd'hui on est rentré dans une sorte de silence. On s'est tellement fait dire quoi faire. On était partout, puis comme d'être tout, puis d'un coup-là, il y a eu un retranchement [duquel] on n'aurait pas sorti, même que c'était important de sortir* ».

As a formerly observant Catholic, architect Jacques Plante said that the revolution of the Nation's education system dramatically affected his generation's relationship with the Church. Virtually free public post-secondary education and an ambient Marxism meant that in one fell swoop young Quebecers' cosmos became unrecognisable to that of their parents. He remembered religion being "purged from public institutions as from one day to the next" and that this resulting change of attitude caused panic among his family; "We stopped going to church when I was 18 and my mother was completely panicked. It was quite a drama"⁹⁸⁰.

c) *A More Authentic Church: The Voluntary Model*

Some members of Plante's generation had a different experience with their relationship to religion. Cultural change reinforced their faith rather than diminished it. Fortin reflected that painful existential lessons can be providential.

I think it's up to us as a community to live the faith we've received differently. In the 40s and 50s, everyone was French-Canadian, if they came from the Saguenay, the Beauce or the Gaspé, it didn't matter. We were all the same. The Church opened the doors, then people left and didn't come back. But some people stayed, and it's up to us to welcome the others back. It's up to us to offer the message we've received⁹⁸¹

Jean-François Fortin's experience with the Church had convinced him that the transition from obligation to voluntary experience, for the sacrament of confession, for example, has been enriching.

⁹⁸⁰ See interview with Jacques Plante by Ryan Lux, July 10, 2020, 15:00 mins., original: « On a arrêté d'aller à l'église j'avais 18 ans et ma mère était complètement paniquée. C'était tout un drame ».

⁹⁸¹ See interview with Jean-François Fortin by Ryan Lux, July 10, 2020, 20:00 mins., original: « Je pense qu'il nous appartient comme communauté de vivre différemment la foi qu'on a reçue. Pendant les années 40-50, tout le monde était canadien-français, si le monde venait du Saguenay, de la Beauce, de la Gaspésie, puis ça finissait là. Ça a tout changé. L'Église a ouvert les portes, puis les gens sont partis et ne sont pas revenus. Mais il y a des gens qui sont restés et c'est à nous de les accueillir. C'est à nous de proposer le message que nous avons reçu ».

Whereas it used to be an obligation, we no longer have that conformist mentality. But it's up to us to reinvent ourselves to be able to spread that. I'd rather have a smaller community, but one that lives its faith fully, than a church that's full but with people who don't want to be there. There's something missing⁹⁸².

He made sense of the present disequilibrium as a long-drawn out acknowledgement of Catholicism's reality in Quebec society and adjusting expectations accordingly.

We're in transition. The way the faith is transmitted has changed enormously, the Church has undergone enormous change, and we're reaping some of the rewards of this transition. My parents' generation and grandparents were still very religious. Our parents lived through this liberalisation, this great opening of the church doors, and some of us have decided that we want to continue, and that we've deepened our faith, but that means we have to rethink the ways in which we pass it on. Except that, at the same time as this transition, there's always the financial side of things, which doesn't let up. At some point, what do we do? The Christian community is in transition, and then the non-Christian community, which doesn't practise or believe, evolves in parallel. When it hears our calls, it will decide how to respond⁹⁸³.

This transition, while refreshing for those who felt the previous triumphant configuration ossified and conformist, was not good news for monumental churches like Saint-Jean-Baptiste, whose flamboyant majesty and grandiose volumes emphasised their anachronism with respect to the Church's new liturgy and approach to its social role. Meanwhile, for those who liked the stability, social solidarity, and collective identity provided by the "inherited religion" configuration,

⁹⁸² *Idem.*, 22:00 mins., original: « Alors qu'auparavant, c'était une obligation, on n'est plus dans cette mentalité-là de conformisme. Mais il nous appartient de nous réinventer pour être capable de propager ça. Je préfère d'avoir une communauté plus petite, mais qui vit pleinement sa foi, que d'avoir une église qui est pleine, mais avec les gens qui ne veulent pas être là. Ça manque quelque chose ».

⁹⁸³ *Idem.* 40:00 mins., original: « On est en transition. La façon de transmettre la foi a énormément changé. L'Église a énormément changé et on récolte un peu les fruits de cette transition. La génération de mes parents, les grands-parents étaient encore très croyants. Nos parents, eux, ont vécu cette libéralisation, cette grande ouverture des portes de l'Église et nous avons, quelques-uns, décidé qu'on voulait continuer, approfondi notre foi, mais, avec ça, il faut revoir les façons de la transmettre. Sauf que, parallèlement, à cette transition-là, il y a toujours la finance qui est là et qui ne lâche pas. Puis, à un moment donné, qu'est-ce qu'on fait? La communauté chrétienne est en transition, puis la communauté non chrétienne qui ne pratique pas, ou qui ne croit pas, elle évolue en parallèle. Elle entend les appels qu'on lance probablement. On décidera de répondre ou non ».

churches like Saint-Jean-Baptiste become symbols of nostalgia for a golden age eclipsed by hyper individualism.

d) *Church Responsibility to Religious Heritage: What is Fair?*

Inevitably, governments accused the Church of abdicating its responsibility for religious heritage once it no longer turned a profit, while the Church found the proposition of stewardship for the nation's entire religious heritage absurd when only between five and ten per cent of Quebeckers attended Mass and contributed to the Church on a weekly basis. Institutional civil society blamed the Church for its blind ambition for radical change and grassroots civil society blamed the City for its failure to protect one of its most precious urban assets from speculation. Traditionalist Catholics like Richard Émond were likewise frustrated by the City's limited scope of intervention and acknowledged that short of purchasing the church, Saint-Jean-Baptiste's destiny was solely in the hands of the Diocese⁹⁸⁴. He also blamed the Parish and the Diocese for failing to protect his link with religion as tradition.

Promises were made, yes, many promises were made. But the Diocese and the Parish don't want anything to do with it. The parish priest doesn't want anything to do with restoring here. People are fed up. They don't want to fight anymore because it's no use⁹⁸⁵.

Despite the impatience of residents like Émond, Abbé Gingras was forthright from the outset that the Parish and Diocese were in no hurry to roll out a project, but five years later, when I visited Quebec City, people were exasperated. Fortin explained that as an institution, the Church moves

⁹⁸⁴ See interview with Richard Émond by Ryan Lux, July 11, 2020, 60:00 mins., original: « *Le maire écoute ce que le diocèse dit, parce que lui, il ne prend aucune décision sur son territoire. La chose qu'il peut dire et peut dire au curé ou au diocèse, c'est « on va acheter l'église », mais ça prend des moyens et il y a déjà plusieurs églises qui sont détruites dans le quartier* ».

⁹⁸⁵ *Idem.*, 7:00 mins., original: « *Il y avait des promesses qui étaient faites. Oui, beaucoup de promesses ont été faites. Mais le diocèse, la paroisse, ne veut rien savoir. Le curé ne veut rien savoir de restaurer ici. Les gens sont tannés. Ils veulent plus se battre, parce que ça ne sert pas à grand-chose* ».

at a different rhythm than secular society and that this dissonance was causing friction between the Diocese and the Parish, strict secularist politicians and institutional civil society, on the one hand, and grassroots civil society, open secularist politicians, and traditionalist Catholics on the other. “The Church thinks in terms of centuries, in terms of millennia, but the problems we face now are temporal and urgent”⁹⁸⁶. Dumoulin agreed that the Diocese has adapted awkwardly to transformation and critiqued its efforts as impulsive and reactionary, pointing in contrast to the example of the Augustinian nuns, who meticulously maintained their 400-year-old convent and, who spent some 30 years reflecting on its transformation in line with their values⁹⁸⁷. Rousseau agreed that the Diocese did not factor heritage into its plans for Saint-Jean-Baptiste; “They manage this building as they would an office building, so to speak, that they'll let it go when they don't need it anymore. They don't always share the notion of heritage responsibility”⁹⁸⁸. Dumoulin is even more cynical in his interpretation of the Church’s approach to its historic and expensive churches. He sees the case of Saint-Jean-Baptiste as establishing the Church’s general orientation towards heritage as more and more historically and architecturally significant churches face up to the new socio-religious configuration. “When you want to kill the dog, you say it has rabies. It's very easy to find an engineer who will say "we can't do anything because there's asbestos”⁹⁸⁹.

⁹⁸⁶ See interview with Jean-François Fortin by Ryan Lux, July 10, 2020, 44:00 mins., original: « *L'église pense en termes de siècles, en termes de millénaires, mais les problèmes sont d'ordre temporel et urgent* ».

⁹⁸⁷ See interview with Louis Dumoulin by Ryan Lux, July 8, 2020, 49:00 mins., original: « *Reprendre l'exemple des Augustines. Elles ont réfléchi pendant trente ans comment gérer le patrimoine. Et plus important, elles ont mis l'argent pour le protéger. Cependant l'archidiocèse de Québec a peine à payer le chauffage pour l'église Saint-Jean-Baptiste. Elle essaie de faire perdurer ses œuvres.s* ».

⁹⁸⁸ See interview with Jean Rousseau by Ryan Lux, July 8, 2020, 16:00 mins., original: « *Ils gèrent ce bâtiment comme s'il est un édifice de bureau pour dire vraiment, ils vont le délaissé lorsqu'ils n'en auront plus besoin. La notion de responsabilité patrimoniale, ils ne le partagent pas toujours* ».

⁹⁸⁹ See interview with Louis Dumoulin by Ryan Lux, July 8, 2020, 51:00 mins., original: « *Quand on veut tuer un chien, on dit qu'il a la rage. C'est très facile à trouver un ingénieur qui va dire 'on ne peut rien', qu'il y a del'amiante !* ».

For Fortin, the responsibility for churches lay not with the Church, but society and that their closures represent the inevitable result of the radical differences between contemporary society and the one that built churches like Saint-Jean-Baptiste. Indeed, in Saint-Jean-Baptiste, Lavoie told me he saw an allegory for contemporary society's inability to work together on social projects, despite its affordances of greater wealth and technology⁹⁹⁰. For his part, Saint-Jean-Baptiste's closure dramatically affected Lavoie's understanding of his relationship to the Church and how he conceived of his responsibility as one of its members.

So, today, it makes me feel more responsible in the sense that before, it was the Church that gave to me, and I received. And now I feel like I owe a bit more, that I'm more involved. I also feel a bit lonelier because the believers around me aren't necessarily close to me. I feel like I need to help make the church myself. The church is no longer just the purveyor of my religious needs⁹⁹¹.

Thus, closure can have an empowering effect given the right ingredients. Afterall, the idea of tearing down the old and rebuilding has sound gospel and historical foundations for public Churches. But that is not what Lavoie meant. Instead, Lavoie's experience represented the perfect synthesis of the Church-State dilemma. He frankly did not care who took care of Saint-Jean-Baptiste, Church, or State, he just cared about the church itself, and its closure reminded him that ultimately, both domains are extensions of himself; that in the end, he can only be responsible for his own actions.

⁹⁹⁰See interview with Sébastien Lavoie by Ryan Lux, July 10, 2020, 40:00 mins., original, « *Il y avait une mentalité très, très, différente. Maintenant il y a toute cette veine d'individualisme qui vient avec une société de surconsommation et probablement ça impacte sur la capacité de gérer ensemble et évidemment sur la communauté chrétienne* ».

⁹⁹¹ *Idem.*, 49:00 mins., original: « *Et après, aujourd'hui, ça me responsabilise dans le sens qu'avant, c'était l'Église qui m'a donné, alors je recevais. Et maintenant j'ai l'impression de devoir un peu plus, de m'impliquer plus. Je me sens aussi un peu plus seul, les croyants qui m'entouraient ne sont pas nécessairement tout près de moi. On a un peu l'impression d'avoir besoin de faire l'église un peu soi-même. L'église n'est plus la pourvoyeuse de mes besoins religieux* ».

We have discussed how Saint-Jean Baptiste's closure and its treatment risked establishing precedents in the religious domain on multiple registers and how that risk has affected its destiny. Specifically, and principally, I presented participants' perceptions of how Saint-Jean-Baptiste's closure represented the Quebec Catholic Church's transition from a public to a private Church and how that transformation is positively perceived by clergy, Modernist Catholics, and institutional civil society, who take a longer view of how to resolve the crisis than populist⁹⁹² elements. Lastly, I conveyed a variety of perspectives on what the Church owed to Quebec's religious heritage. Now, conversely, let us tackle the subsequent section dedicated to the precedents this case poses for the State.

2. *Saint-Jean-Baptiste: A State Precedent*

The destiny of Saint-Jean-Baptiste did not only keep the clergy up at night; it also worried those of more secular persuasions. These actors worried about how Saint-Jean-Baptiste's treatment might affect the way they would have to treat the dozens of other architectural masterpieces that punctuate the Saint Lawrence Valley.

a) *Trepidation: Governmental Capacity vs. Hesitation*

Like the Church, the State was also cautious about how it should proceed with Saint-Jean-Baptiste, even though, as with the Church, governments at all levels must have acknowledged that some kind of response would be inevitable. The nationalising precedent, almost already established by the tens of millions already spent on Saint-Jean-Baptiste, taken any further could place the Quebec government in the same place as the French government, which though aggressively secular, nevertheless is responsible for the Nation's most monumental churches. Architect Jacques Plante

⁹⁹² Here, I do not attach a negative connotation to populism.

told me that a massive architectural achievement like Saint-Jean-Baptiste cannot simply be the responsibility of individuals, or a patchwork of organisations and blamed the lack of government initiative on Quebeckers' incoherent relationship to their religious heritage. He pointed to, on the one hand, the populist rage stoked by church closure, and on the other, the reality that the same population consistently elected politicians who lack any daring when it comes to religious heritage⁹⁹³. City councillor Jean Rousseau dreamed of a system like the one in France where any remarkable church would merit State support, or the Anglosphere Trust system promoted by John Porter. This solution would have resolved the dilemma, but not in a blockbuster fashion like mass closure or nationalisation.

At the moment I don't know if it's stalled, but Mr. Porter was approached by the school, and he was quite an eloquent spokesman for the project. The mayor was convinced that federal parliamentary deputy Mr. Duclos would find the idea very interesting. So, there was enough in place that we'd be able to come up with a solution quickly, but there was one essential ingredient missing, and that was leadership⁹⁹⁴.

Leadership requires vision and an appreciation for the challenges faced by both the State and the Church would have been enough to discourage leaders to step forward. Given that a major pillar of Quebec society is fairness, the manner in which Saint-Jean-Baptiste would be treated mattered significantly and politically. What could an isolated intervention mean? Would the State intervene in religious heritage based on criteria of history, architecture, community, or perhaps lottery? On the eve of another wave of massive church closures, Saint-Jean-Baptiste represented a test case. Would the State, like France, nationalise the most significant churches, or would it allow the

⁹⁹³See interview with Jacques Plante by Ryan Lux, July 10, 2020, 3:00 mins., original: « *Je pense que c'est au gouvernement et non pas aux individus de prendre soin du patrimoine, simplement. Donc, le gouvernement était élu par la population; donc, la population a fait son choix* ».

⁹⁹⁴ See interview with Jean Rousseau by Ryan Lux, July 8, 2020, 18:00 mins., original: « *En ce moment je ne sais pas si c'est au point mort, mais M. Porter a été sollicité par l'école et il a été un porte-parole assez éloquent pour le projet. Le maire était convaincu que M. Duclos aurait trouvé l'idée forte intéressante. Alors, il y avait des éléments en place qui faisait qu'on pensait être capable rapidement d'arriver avec une solution, mais il a manqué un ingrédient essentiel, et c'était du leadership* ».

special among them to fall on the principle of equity? The State, through its own religious heritage council, admitted some responsibility for religious heritage, though only half-heartedly. As with hospitals and schools, funding announcements for church renovations are fertile campaign fodder, the rare kind which appeals to politicians across the aisle and is used for pork barrel politicking. This is because Quebecers like their churches, but do not want to pay for them out of local coffers. As such, politicians never miss an opportunity to announce even the most banal funding for their local church. Given this tendency, Sébastien Lavoie wondered aloud why Saint-Jean-Baptiste had been left empty for so long. Did the community not apply enough political pressure?

Perhaps if parishioners rose up more? Had solidarity? Proposed things? Ideally, a collective project could have created a more vibrant parish life, woken each other up, I don't know, lit the fire. We'd have liked to see some kind of realisation, some kind of movement around the church⁹⁹⁵

My question is, how much pressure would they have to apply, and how, to force governments to reorient its religious heritage policies?

(1) The City: Stuck Between a Rock and a Hard Place

It is well known that sometimes a blessing can be a curse and so it is for Quebec City in the realm of religious heritage: comprehensive maintenance of its religious heritage, the result of its status as the capital of the nation's religious piety for four centuries, is totally beyond the scope of its resources. Quebec City served as the institutional seat of the Church's nationwide institutions entrusted with the social welfare, culture and economy of the French-Canadian nation for 120 years, a situation which meant that, in this city, churches were the essential raw material of the social fabric in an even more intense manner than elsewhere in Quebec, where the Church already

⁹⁹⁵ See interview with Sébastien Lavoie by Ryan Lux, July 10, 2020, 23:00 mins., original: « *Peut-être que si les paroissiens s'étaient plus soulevés? Pour se mettre ensemble, proposer les choses? Mais idéalement, peut-être pour avoir une vie paroissiale plus concentrée, pour se réveiller mutuellement, je ne sais pas, pour allumer le feu. On aurait aimé qu'il y eut une espèce de prise de conscience, qu'il y avait une espèce de mouvement autour de l'église* ».

occupied a preponderant position. Imagine a capital city with all of its various ministries, education, foreign affairs, the economy, health etc., except that all of these headquarters were religious orders and that being the capital their presence produces an outsized interest in religious (institutional) affairs in the same way that a secular political capital might produce a disproportionate interest in public affairs, Ottawa for example. Then consider what might happen socially if the capital moved, in the way that Canada's political capital moved to Ottawa from Quebec in 1857. The result is a massive cultural, symbolic, political, demographic and economic upheaval which necessarily entails casualties.

Because Quebec City has so many important churches, the religious heritage council's banners can be found virtually everywhere proclaiming: "Our religious heritage, it's sacred", work that has not gone unnoticed by most of the people I spoke with, but many agreed that the City, as well as the Quebec government, had squandered their strategic potential with respect to Saint-Jean-Baptiste and the city's other four huge churches: the cathedral basilica, Saint-Roch, Saint-Sauveur and Saint-Charles-de-Limoilou⁹⁹⁶. Parish secretary Jean-François Fortin cited a report by the auditor general to express his view that municipalities, in general do not invest enough in religious heritage⁹⁹⁷. Organiser Larry Dumoulin's grievances were not so much with the municipal structure itself, with which he is a very engaged citizen participant, but with the long-governing political party led by Régis Labeaume, which represented the polar opposite of Saint-Jean-Baptiste

⁹⁹⁶ See Catherine Genest, « Le catastrophe patrimoniale dont tout le monde se fout », *Voir*, May 14, 2015, (web) consulted October 19, 2020, <https://voir.ca/chroniques/satellite-418/2015/05/14/la-catastrophe-patrimoniale-dont-tout-le-monde-se-fout/>.

⁹⁹⁷ See in interview with Sébastien Lavoie by Ryan Lux, July 10, 2020, 32:00 mins., original: « *Il y a un rapport de vérificateur général publié, il n'y a pas longtemps, qui disait que les municipalités et le Québec ne s'impliquaient pas assez pour la protection du patrimoine bâti* ».

neighbourhood's political orientation⁹⁹⁸. Richard Émond agreed that Saint-Jean-Baptiste's location was likely a factor in the dossier's lack of momentum.

Since Mayor Labeaume took office, none of his city councillors have been in the neighbourhood here. All around, the ring around it, he's won because they're more bourgeois neighbourhoods. Here it's always the opposition, and the same goes for Saint-Roch and Limoilou. When he does come, he's very poorly received⁹⁹⁹.

Whether due to instrumental reasons or because of its potential to set a precedent, city councillor Jean Rousseau said he thought the City's waste of citizen engagement was a shame, yet indicative of its governance style in general:

The city certainly doesn't want residents to take charge. Our party wants residents to be able to get more involved. We're really in front of a neoliberal current. The city is telling us "That's fine, let us decide. We know what needs to be done, don't tell us how it works and if you don't agree, that's your problem". That's the municipal reality here in Quebec City¹⁰⁰⁰.

Abbé Gingras was careful to point out that this mentality is not shared by all municipal governments recalling the closures he participated in before the forced amalgamations of Quebec's many boroughs in 2002. Saint-Eugène's closure in particular served Abbé Gingras as an example of how positive the transfer of a church to a municipality can be. The church was transformed into a community centre and Abbé Gingras remembered fondly the ceremony during which he passed

⁹⁹⁸ See interview with Louis Dumoulin by Ryan Lux, July 8, 2020, 21 :00 mins., original : « *Pour les politiciens de notre quartier, il semble que nous sommes toujours en opposition* ».

⁹⁹⁹ See interview with Richard Émond by Ryan Lux, July 11, 2020, 45:00 mins., original: « *Depuis que le maire Labeaume est au pouvoir, il n'y a aucun de ses conseillers municipaux qui rentraient dans le quartier ici. Tout autour, la couronne autour, il a gagné, parce qu'ils sont des quartiers plus bourgeois. Ici, c'est toujours l'opposition, même chose pour Saint-Roch, et Limoilou. Lorsqu'il vient, il est très mal reçu Puis, celui qui va se présenter pour lui [son parti politique], dans l'élection prochaine, ne va pas gagner non* ».

¹⁰⁰⁰ See interview with Jean Rousseau by Ryan Lux, July 8, 2020, 14:00 mins., original: « *La ville ne veut surtout pas que les résidents la prennent en main. Nous, notre parti, on veut que les résidents puissent davantage s'impliquer. On est vraiment devant un courant néolibéral. La ville nous dit 'c'est bon, laissez-nous décider : on sait ce qu'il faut faire, ne nous dites pas comment ça fonctionne et si vous n'êtes pas d'accord. C'est votre problème'. C'est la réalité municipale ici à Québec* ».

the church to the mayor and city councillors as the bells tolled for the final time “Mayor Cardinal's concern at the time was to save what people had invested in building the church, so that it could remain for the good of the community... So here we're fighting for the same thing, but we don't have the support”¹⁰⁰¹. After such positive cooperation, his experience working with Quebec City came as a surprise. Abbé Gingras recalled awaiting the City's response to a proposal for months when the City requested a press conference with hardly any notice, without even briefing him on what it regarded; “on the Sunday [Labeaume] wanted to do this, I wasn't there, I was in Europe, so he wanted to hold a press conference in my church in my absence”¹⁰⁰². When I asked the priest what he expected, given that Labeaume repeatedly insisted at the outset that he would only play a liaison role between the Church and the government of Quebec, he replied bluntly: “[e]ven if he did play a facilitator's role, he would have to play. Words are always easy, but the reality is quite different”¹⁰⁰³

Less than impressed as they were, all participants nevertheless had a positive outlook for Saint-Jean-Baptiste and the City's role in realising it. When the City, via the Porter Commission, largely co-opted *Espace Solidaire's* proposal involving the elementary school, Carole Jacques-Savaria was pleased, despite the fact that the City had pushed their group to the periphery¹⁰⁰⁴. Émond likewise had a good feeling about Saint-Jean-Baptiste when we spoke in July 2020.

He's slowly changing his approach, as you can see. He used to be in favour of big buildings, but since the pandemic, he's completely changed his mind. And

¹⁰⁰¹ See interview with Abbé Pierre Gingras by Ryan Lux, July 8, 37:00 mins., original: « *Et c'était très facile de passer Saint-Eugène à un centre communautaire* ».

¹⁰⁰² *Idem.*, 23:00 mins., original: « *On devrait eu une réponse de la ville, l'été dernier. Même que le maire nous a approchés pour faire une conférence de presse, pour annoncer un projet, le dimanche où il voulait faire ça, moi, je n'étais pas là, j'étais en Europe; alors, lui, il voulait faire une conférence de presse dans mon église, en mon absence. Puis ç'a été remis, et remis encore et on n'a jamais entendu d'autres nouvelles* ».

¹⁰⁰³ *Idem.*, 41:00 mins., original : « *Même s'il joue un rôle de facilitateur, il faut jouer. Les mots sont toujours faciles, mais la réalité, c'est tout autre chose* ».

¹⁰⁰⁴ See interview with Carole Jacques-Savaria by Ryan Lux, July 10, 2020, 29:00 mins., original: « *C'est pour ça que je dis que des idées de base sont là. Est-ce que s'agit maintenant de la volonté politique. Est-ce que la volonté des gens du quartier est là? Il y avait beaucoup de gens qui s'expriment en faveur de la sauvegarde* ».

the mayor wants to leave I don't know if it's his last word, but he wants to leave something. He's much greener than he was”¹⁰⁰⁵.

Rousseau likewise saw the mayor as an integral participant. He felt that after so many years, and having felt its loss, most residents were prepared to contribute, but not just to any project; the problem so far has not been collective will, he said, but rather trepidation at the top.

The challenge is to find the political leadership. The City doesn't want to take it on because it says, "I've already given \$30 million". But where is it? What is it doing with the \$30 million? The federal government can't intervene because it doesn't have jurisdiction, unless they nationalise the building. However, they are prepared to contribute. For the Quebec government, it's always a question of precedent. If we did that for Saint-Jean-Baptiste church, well, everyone would want us to intervene.¹⁰⁰⁶

Churchwarden Philippe Chagnon gave credit where credit was due; he thought the City was pulling its weight but that it had the unenviable task of pushing the national government into the next phase of dealing with the church closure phenomenon.

You can't turn every church into a library or a circus. In short, I think the city looked after the churches as best it could, but it's impossible to do 100%. There's also a big political game where the city wants the province to get involved and then the province wants the communities to get involved, and then the churches close and the projects fall through because there's no viable project. All Abbé Pierre's efforts to raise awareness didn't work because there was indecision at every level¹⁰⁰⁷.

¹⁰⁰⁵ See interview with Richard Émond by Ryan Lux, July 11, 2020, 30:00 mins., « *Moi, j'ai l'impression que peut-être quelque chose va bouger bientôt parce que le maire est en train de changer d'optique. Il veut changer tranquillement d'optique on le voit. Avant, il était pour les gros bâtiments, mais, depuis la pandémie, ça a complètement changé l'optique. Puis le maire, il veut laisser je ne sais pas si c'est son dernier terme, mais il veut laisser quelque chose Il est beaucoup plus vert qu'il était* ».

¹⁰⁰⁶ See interview with Jean Rousseau by Ryan Lux, July 8, 2020, 10:00 mins.

¹⁰⁰⁷ See interview with Philippe Chagnon by Ryan Lux, July 6, 2020, 15:00 mins., original: « *On ne peut pas transformer toutes les églises en bibliothèques ou de cirques. Bref, je pense que la ville s'occupait d'églises le mieux qu'elle pouvait, mais c'est impossible de le faire à 100%. Il y a aussi un grand jeu politique où la ville veut que la province s'implique et puis la province veut que les communautés s'impliquent, puis les églises ferment et les projets tombent, parce qu'il n'y a pas de projet viable. Tous les efforts de sensibilisation de l'abbé Pierre n'ont pas bien fonctionné, puisqu'il y avait de l'indécision à tous les niveaux* ».

(2) No Playing Favourites: The Quebec State and Saint-Jean-Baptiste

Despite its proximity and historic generosity to Saint-Jean-Baptiste, Quebec's Ministry of Culture took a surprisingly hands off approach, given that the church was one of its most recognised examples of "religious heritage" with respect to Jacques Plante's criteria: history, architectural merit, rarity and location. As it turned out, the Quebec government was prepared to call Abbé Pierre's bluff and engage in a stand-off. Although Abbé Gingras knew the City was wary of involving itself too much in religious heritage, he assumed the Quebec government would swoop in, as it had in the cases of nearby Protestant church closures, such as the Wesleyan and Anglican churches. Had he known the City would stonewall the church's rapid transformation, Abbé Gingras admitted that he would have thought twice about using the church as an ultimatum.

In fact, there are zero examples of the Quebec government assuming sole responsibility of a church. So far, the government has preferred to channel funding through its religious heritage council to individual parishes or municipalities to spend themselves on conservation. The case of Saint-Jean-Baptiste, with its popular support, integral historical role, national spotlight, inconvertibility, and religious and arguably economic impossibility for self-sufficiency was finally pressing the State to respond to church closures in a new and more expensive manner. The only comparable case is that of Très-Saint-Nom-de-Jésus in Montréal, another enormous triumphant church, which was on the point of re-opening as a centre for the arts, in large part funded by the Quebec government, but which was unexpectedly re-opened to worship when Cardinal Ouellet was replaced by Archbishop Mgr. Christian Lépine, much to the chagrin of secular organisers. Still, for Saint-Jean-Baptiste, the trouble was that the Diocese would not deal with a not-for-profit and had serious disagreements with the City with respect to funding, both of which discouraged

Quebec's governments from getting involved. The closest the Québec government came to taking part in the church's transformation was the proposal to use the church as a workshop for national school of traditional arts and crafts. The idea was Labeaume's pet project and made sense to Abbé Gingras who explained that Mgr. François-de-Laval himself created a school at Cap-Tourmente to train church builders in 1663.

We could have been inspired by what the first settlers did and then recreated this dynamic profession and I'm sure that the Ministry of Education would be quite close to that. The Ministry of Culture too, but it's always a question of funding envelopes that they don't want to invest. When we propose things, the answer is always that the government doesn't have any money. But since the pandemic, \$300 billion has come out of the federal budget and how many million dollars out of the provincial budget¹⁰⁰⁸.

The whole idea of the school was noble, but unachievable, to architect Jacques Plante, who insisted that the Quebec government was structurally unsuited to such endeavours due to a trifecta of defects; a lack of specialists, vision, and resources¹⁰⁰⁹. For those reasons, Plante believed, as did Gingras, that the Ministry was simply stalling for time. Technically, Plante explained, the Church had zero legal responsibility for Saint-Jean-Baptiste and accordingly, it had no intention of draining its resources to save the church, in the same way that it had approached the other Upper-Town church closures. The Ministry of Culture, however, which was ultimately responsible, was, according to Plante, also incompetent in the domain¹⁰¹⁰. Instead of heritage expertise, Plante

¹⁰⁰⁸ *Idem.*, 43:00 mins., original: « On aurait pu s'inspirer de ce que les premiers colons ont fait, puis recréer cette dynamique de métier et je suis sûr que le ministère de l'Éducation aurait été assez proche de ça. Le ministère de la culture aussi, mais bon ce sont toujours des enveloppes de financement qu'on ne veut pas investir. Quand on propose les choses, la réponse est toujours que le gouvernement n'a pas d'argent. Ils sont toujours à la dernière cenne. Mais depuis la pandémie, c'est 300 milliards de dollars qui sont sortis du fédéral et combien millions de dollars du provincial! ».

¹⁰⁰⁹ See interview with Jacques Plante by Ryan Lux, July 10, 2020, 4:00 mins., original: « Donc, c'est vraiment difficile pour une collectivité de vouloir prendre en charge une église, parce qu'il va arriver les mêmes problèmes : il n'y a pas de spécialiste, il n'y a pas de vision, il n'y a pas d'argent. Ils veulent juste la garder, mais ce n'est pas assez ».

¹⁰¹⁰ *Idem.*, 29:00 mins., original: « C'est clair que le diocèse ne veut pas payer pour ça. Le ministère est obligé, mais je crois que le ministère doit avoir des architectes beaucoup plus expérimentés, plus cultivés. Je ne dirai pas qu'il n'y en a aucun, mais ils ont besoin de plus des gens qui ont voyagé pour voir comment on pourrait aborder le patrimoine ».

accused the various governments of Quebec for using religious heritage to make political hay, citing the case of Saint-Sacrement, a church further down the road from Saints-Martyrs-Canadien, likewise frequented by influential people, as an example of the absolute lack of neutrality of the Quebec State when it came to religious heritage¹⁰¹¹. Abbé Gingras agreed that the missing piece was the Quebec government's lack of political will. He compared the church's restoration to the recent construction of the city's new stadium, suggesting that there were at least as many supporters of religious heritage as there were hockey fans¹⁰¹².

Meanwhile, where the State had intervened in regard to church closures actors told me the Quebec government had been more of a hindrance than a help, despite its resources¹⁰¹³. Moreover, trying to get various levels of government to communicate with each other, even for a flagship case like that of Saint-Jean-Baptiste had been next to impossible, according to Louis Dumoulin¹⁰¹⁴. Instead of trying to pass the puck, Carole Jacques-Savaria told me she wished the Quebec State would accompany parish councils along the process of church closure, "I would have liked all the stakeholders to speak to each other. Because it was the Ministry of Culture that put the seal on the

¹⁰¹¹ *Idem.*, 39:00 mins., original: « C'est la politique qui entre en ligne de compte et l'église Saint-Sacrement, c'est exactement un cas politique. Parce que les gens s'opposaient, ce sont des gens avec beaucoup d'influence, donc le ministère vient de déclarer que l'église soit préservée et c'est un peu ridicule, parce qu'elle n'est pas si exceptionnelle. Eh bien, il faut choisir entre l'église Saint-Jean-Baptiste et l'église Saint Sacrement c'est certain qu'on ne peut pas faire les deux et Saint-Jean-Baptiste est plus petit que Saint Sacrement. Saint-Jean-Baptiste, c'est plus étroit et Saint-Sacrement aussi beaucoup plus haut, donc ça coûte très cher. Quand il y a 3,000 personnes dedans, ça réchauffe pas mal, mais quand il y a une centaine de personnes et qu'il fait -30, il fait frêre ».

¹⁰¹² See interview with Abbé Pierre Gingras by Ryan Lux, July 8, 2020, 19:00 mins., original: « Il n'y a pas de volonté politique. Quand les projets ne viennent pas d'eux, ils ne fonctionnent pas. Ce n'est pas une question d'argent. On investit 400 millions de dollars pour construire le Centre Vidéotron et ce n'est pas tout le monde qui est sportif, ce n'est pas tout le monde qui va là. Actuellement, ils rencontrent la difficulté de remplir le bâtiment. Même si les gens ne sont pas d'accord, on le fait ».

¹⁰¹³ See interview with Jean-François Fortin by Ryan Lux, July 10, 2020, 9:00 mins., original: « Mais, les différents paliers de gouvernements ne se sont pas montrés intéressés. Ils ne voulaient pas s'impliquer. Ils ne voulaient pas financer, puis ils nous disaient qu'il y avait certaines exigences ».

¹⁰¹⁴ See interview with Louis Dumoulin by Ryan Lux, July 8, 2020, 38:00 mins., original: « On a déjà participé dans une commission parlementaire sur le patrimoine religieux, puis c'est sûr que là-dedans, en s'entend que le pire résultat, c'est la démolition. Il faut que ça soit un endroit qui est ouvert à la population. Il faut que ça participe dans la vie économique, culturelle, et communautaire, il faut que ça soit un bâtiment qui est ouvert. En même temps, c'est un bâtiment qui est très fragile, alors on ne peut pas accepter n'importe quoi ».

fact that the church is a historical monument. Before doing that, you have to look at the future vocations”¹⁰¹⁵.

Those whom I spoke with were generally optimistic about the church’s future but at the same time exasperated with all levels of government, but especially with the main player, Quebec. Abbé Gingras, who spent almost a decade trying to engage the Quebec government, simply gave up.

we came up with some very interesting ideas that were in keeping with the character of the church. The Genealogical Society wanted to occupy part of the church. We wanted to have a show like at the Basilica in Montreal. We wanted to have a museum space and a space for worship. They told us that there was no parking, but there isn't any in Montreal either¹⁰¹⁶.

Saint-Jean-Baptiste’s needs do not really fit within the competencies of one level of government or another, because in both cases, the assumption of precedent is daunting and, frankly, the structure of the Church is a unicameral monarchical alternative to the State, so a bureaucratic solution is not obvious. Whether the Quebec government or the City would make a daring move, five or six massive naves would be next in line. To share the burden, the notion of a National Trust did gain some traction and even led to the creation of a commission, which yielded some concrete measures with which to proceed.

¹⁰¹⁵ See interview with Carole Jacques-Savaria, July 10, 2020, 21:00 mins., original: « *Je sais que, financièrement, les fabriques sont confrontées à prendre des décisions, bonnes ou mauvaises, on n'est pas là pour juger, mais j'aurais souhaité que tous les acteurs se parlent. Parce que c'est quand même le ministère de Culture qui a apposé le sceau que l'église est un monument historique, avant de faire ça, il faut voir les vocations. Alors, ministère de Culture, ville de Québec, diocèse... j'aurais souhaité que tous ces gens-là se parlent pour trouver une vocation, bien avant la fermeture* ».

¹⁰¹⁶ See interview with Abbé Pierre Gingras by Ryan Lux, July 8, 2020, 20:00 mins., original: « *Pourtant, pour l'église ou pour les bâtiments religieux, on ne veut pas, là. Il y a une volonté politique derrière ça parce qu'on a proposé des choses quand même très intéressantes et qui allaient avec le caractère de l'église. La Société de généalogie voulait en faire une partie dans l'église. On voulait avoir un spectacle comme à la basilique de Montréal. On voulait avoir un espace muséal et un espace pour le culte. Il nous répondit qu'il n'y a pas de stationnement, mais il n'y en a pas non plus à Montréal* ».

(3) A Third Way: Towards a New Model?

In 2018, the Porter Commission recommended a middle approach which would bring together the City, the Québec government and the Church, not unlike the Church's 2010 proposal with respect to the transfer of the five massive naves, which finally offered some promise for Saint-Jean-Baptiste. This time the model was proposed by Louis Dumoulin's *Espace Solidaire*, following the City's announcement to earmark \$30 million over ten years along with the Québec government which matched the promised investment¹⁰¹⁷. The innovation would have resolved the reticence of all parties and the game of chicken they were stuck in with respect to establishing precedent, city councillor and mayoral candidate Jean Rousseau was clear, that the present model offered little hope of breaking the stalemate. He formulated the dilemma in this way, "The challenge is that we don't have a management model for managing a building like this. The model we have is that of owner. As an owner, you can do what you want. On the other hand, with a heritage building, you can't do as you please. So, we talked about the notion of a trust"¹⁰¹⁸. For Rousseau, the British and American models were the most appropriate in their accounting of the community's role in heritage.

The challenge we face is around the notion of a trust. They're not supposed to be used for emergencies. The challenge we have is around the notion of a trust. We have English models. On the American side, we have trust where there is a very strong commitment on the part of the community. The community goes beyond attachment, beyond those who used to go to mass here¹⁰¹⁹.

¹⁰¹⁷ See interview with Jean-François Fortin by Ryan Lux, July 10, 2020, 52:00 mins., original: « *On a proposé la création d'une fondation avec le diocèse. L'idée était qu'ils auraient contribué à ce que la ville et l'État ont déjà promis, 30 millions \$ sur 10 ans. Mais même ça, ce n'est pas assez* ».

¹⁰¹⁸ See interview with Jean Rousseau by Ryan Lux, July 8, 2020, 7:00 mins.

¹⁰¹⁹ *Idem.*, 10:00 mins., original: « *Le défi qu'on a, c'est autour de la notion d'une fiducie. Ils ne sont pas censés être utilisés pour des urgences. On a des modèles anglophones. Du côté américain, on a des trusts où on a un engagement très fort de la part de la communauté. La communauté, au-delà de l'attachement, de ceux qui allaient à la messe, ici* ».

A trust would also have nurtured the same community responsabilisation that Sébastien Lavoie aspires to. Rousseau emphasised Saint-Jean-Baptiste's philanthropic need. "You also need patronage and philanthropy. You need people to get involved in a project. Like the big foundations, where everyone wants to look good, so I have to give, and that's what's weird, because ultimately money attracts money"¹⁰²⁰. The only trouble with the model was that its mentality took for granted the eclipse of the Church's energy and thus simultaneously failed to take its sensibilities seriously, as well as basing the financial model on what would have essentially been expropriation. This position was favoured by those caught in the middle of the stand-off between governments and the Church: the people who lived in the community, prayed in its nave and frequented its downstairs, like Chagnon, Jacques-Savaria, Émond, Rousseau, Lavoie and Fortin. Though actors from both the bishop's palace and Labeaume's government were unwilling to participate in this study, it is useful to situate them within our typology. What we see is the same dynamic as in Rimouski, with each insisting the other take the larger role and assume greater permanent structural responsibility of huge historic churches' ownership and governance. But Saint-Jean-Baptiste not only poses logistical precedents in terms of financial responsibility and governance, it also marks a watershed in the State's role in managing the Church's national legacy as religious heritage.

b) Understanding the State's Increasing Religious Heritage Role

Saint-Jean-Baptiste has forced the Quebec government to reckon with the very way in which it supports religious heritage via a system of one-time grants through its arm length religious heritage council because in this case there is no longer a group willing to administer them to. The care of Saint-Jean-Baptiste, which has received tens of millions of dollars in grants in the last forty years,

¹⁰²⁰ *Idem.*, 14:00 mins., original: « *Et il faut aussi ce mécénat, la philanthropie. Autour d'un tel projet, il faut des individus associés. Comme les grandes fondations, où tout le monde veut être bien vu, donc il faut que je donne, et c'est ça qui est bizarre, parce que finalement, l'argent attire l'argent, mais en même temps, il faut solliciter toutes les petites gens du quartier* ».

is simply too much for anything less than government to take on, and as Chagnon pointed out, not every church can become a library. In response to Saint-Jean-Baptiste's future, participants have had to reflect on their ideas of what constitutes religious heritage and how best to manage it during this accelerated period of cultural change.

(1) Cultural Change

Every participant attributed the reconfiguration of the State's responsibility for religious heritage to successive waves of cultural change with respect to religious socialisation of youth, media discourses of the Church, the growth of hyper-individualism and the pre-eminence of the economy above all other social considerations. Sébastien Lavoie credited his generation's religious education for laying out a generally shared life course. In contrast, he told me, he sees youth subjected to a different kind of secular education, which is ill-equipped to deal with countless challenges posed by new social phenomena and technologies¹⁰²¹. "Yes, the impact has been so much greater since the '60s. The world is evolving so extraordinarily fast that we're in a bit of an era of impact where changes are happening extraordinarily fast, and the Church just isn't used to this speed"¹⁰²². For Abbé Gingras, it is not just society's relationship with the Church that has changed. He explained that people's relation to society and the nearly unique valorisation of the economy would be unrecognisable to traditional French-Canadians.

¹⁰²¹ See interview with Sébastien Lavoie by Ryan Lux, July 10, 2020, 33:00 mins., original: « *Nous, on a fait une éducation religieuse au primaire et tout ça. C'est sûr que ça aide à cheminer là-dedans. Puis, ce que j'allais dire, c'est tous ces nouveaux phénomènes, avec les réseaux sociaux, l'internet, c'est toute une espèce d'éducation nouvelle. Que ça rende la jeunesse tout à fait indifférente à ce qu'on a connu quand on était jeune. Il y a aussi les discours médiatiques où on entend très rarement de bonnes nouvelles à propos de l'Église et de la religion de façon générale. Ça a sûrement une influence, alors voilà, je pense que c'est un phénomène très large ici au Québec, mais aussi pour tout l'Occident chrétien* ».

¹⁰²² *Idem.*, 43:00 mins., original: « *Oui, l'impact est tellement grand depuis les années 60 par rapport à aujourd'hui. Le monde évolue tellement extraordinairement vite que, dans l'échelle du temps, on est un peu dans une époque d'impact du phénomène où des changements vont extraordinairement vite maintenant et l'Église n'est pas habitué à cette vitesse* ».

First of all, the Church is based on a sense of community, whereas today we are more individualistic than at any time in history. Today we're governed solely by the economy, where we're looking to feed the economy at the expense of people's health. Money is what counts. We live in a society where people want everything now; there are no more anticipations and no more longing¹⁰²³.

Jacques Plante located the change, as did the other participants with the arrival of the Quiet Revolution, Quebec's massive and rapid transfer of most social institutions from clerical to secular control, especially the universities; "So the opening of universities to francophones, with free schooling, and religion was evacuated overnight". Plante continued, explaining how losing generation after generation of practising Catholics to universities' influence has posed an existential problem for the Quebec Church¹⁰²⁴. Despite the steady erosion of regular practice, Plante admitted that until recently, almost everyone returned for important celebrations, especially funerals, which would punctually rally even non-believers to Mass, like that of his mother, 23 years ago, which he said was attended by the entire town¹⁰²⁵.

For a more optimistic view of the future, Carole Jacques-Savaria who told me she believed that even though society has irrevocably changed, churches will continue to play important social and even spiritual functions: "I think that these temples are there to bring people back together and I don't think it's over yet. This social side, people need places to see each other, and I think it's worth

¹⁰²³ See interview with Abbé Pierre Gingras by Ryan Lux, July 8, 2020, 25:00 mins., original: « *Pour moi, on est entré dans une tout autre culture. D'abord l'Église repose sur le sens de la communauté alors qu'aujourd'hui, on est plus individualistes qu'à n'importe quelle époque. Aujourd'hui on est gouverné par l'économie uniquement, où on cherche à redémarrer l'économie au-delà de la santé des gens. Alors, ce qui prime, c'est l'argent. On est dans une société où on veut tout maintenant; il n'y a plus d'attente, plus de désirs* ».

¹⁰²⁴ See interview with Jacques Plante by Ryan Lux, July 10, 2020, 15:00 mins., original: « *Et puis avec les années 60, tout a changé d'un coup avec la Révolution tranquille, donc l'ouverture pour les francophones aux universités, avec l'école gratuite, et la religion était évacuée du jour au lendemain. On a arrêté d'aller à l'église j'avais 18 ans et ma mère était complètement paniquée. C'était tout un drame et on est passés d'une période de 80% des francophones allaient à la messe à aujourd'hui c'est 2 à 5 %, ça pose des problèmes* ».

¹⁰²⁵ *Idem.*, 16:00 mins., original: « *Mais aujourd'hui, quand il y a de grandes occasions, je retourne à l'église. Mon beau-père est décédé au mois de février; on a eu les funérailles justes avant la Covid. Les funérailles étaient à Saint-Monique et ça fait partie d'un rituel, c'est dans nous. Quand ma mère est décédée, il y a 23 ans, et quand tu vas aux funérailles, et toute la ville - je viens de Beauport - la ville était à l'église, parce que ma mère était connue, et c'était comme ça* ».

keeping them”¹⁰²⁶. But for what exactly? Unlike the role of cultural change, which all participants agreed, created an environment where increasingly bold closures have forced the State to intervene in the religious domain, conceptualisations of what religious heritage is more varied. The variance, however, depends less on the individual participant as part of a coherent worldview, as we saw in Rimouski, than it on which dimension: religious, historical, or national, the participant chose to highlight.

(2) Conceptualisation of Religious Heritage

In other words, there are various compatible perspectives of Saint-Jean-Baptiste’s religious heritage value so someone from the political realm may choose to highlight governance. He would probably agree with a clergyman’s assessment of what it represents for society, even if they cannot agree on who should pay for it. Recurring themes about the sense of religious heritage were: 1), its importance to the cultural development of Quebec’s collectivist nature; 2), its continued religious and spiritual signification; 3), its distinction from heritage in general as a repository of national achievement; 4), its historical importance in all areas; connection to ancestors and memory; and 5), the need for a national strategy to protect it in its widest sense.

Beginning with whom we left off with, Carole Jacques-Savaria expressed her idea of religious heritage as the buildings being able to maintain their social vocations as centres of neighbourhood life in a secular context, which if done right, she was convinced, would give the buildings she

¹⁰²⁶ See interview with Carole Jacques-Savaria, July 10, 2020, 32:00 mins., original: « *Le patrimoine religieux, même s’il ne sert plus au culte, ça fait partie de notre vie. Oui, je suis une personne qui est consciente que les gens ne vivent plus autour de l’église de la même façon qu’ils le faisaient anciennement. Le rôle du clergé n’a pas la même signification pour certains. Je crois que c’est des temples qui sont là pour revenir aux gens et je crois que ce n’est pas fini. Ce côté social, des gens ont besoin d’endroits pour se voir et je pense qu’il vaut la peine de les garder* ».

loved so much a second lease on life¹⁰²⁷. An important consequence of this approach, for Jacques-Savaria, is that it often preserves aspects of the church themselves, giving those for whom they do have a spiritual dimension the chance to retain a religious connection¹⁰²⁸. In addition to its social role maintaining a certain degree of social solidarity, something dear to Louis Dumoulin, the neighbourhood activist, also cited religious heritage as an important source of other areas of Quebec's collectivist cultural particularity. Specifically, Dumoulin pointed to Quebecers' fraught contemporary relationship to their religious heritage as a reflection of its unique social configuration in North America. The twin tendencies of moral indignation at church closures and the reticence to contribute resources to prevent them, Dumoulin suggested, were the product of Quebec's monopolistic Catholic socio-religious configuration. "Because of our religious upbringing, we have always tried to distance ourselves from the whole business of money, finance, and all that. That was always more for Jews and English Canadians"¹⁰²⁹. Instead, Dumoulin proposed that Catholics were more accustomed to paying what was prescribed and leaving the maintenance of the Church to clergy. A consequence of this de-responsibilisation is that Quebec's

¹⁰²⁷ *Idem.*, 30:00 mins., original: « À travers les années l'histoire du Québec, les églises étaient les anciens centres des quartiers, des villages. C'était un endroit où les gens se voyaient, ce côté social, où ils se voyaient ils se rencontrer à la messe pour prier, mais autrement, il y avait de certains groupes sociaux qui se formaient et c'est évident qu'à travers les années, ça change. Les gens se rencontrent quand même encore et c'est quand même un endroit où tous les gens qui fréquentent l'église se reconnaissent. Je pense qu'il y a de moyens de transformer ces temples-là qui sont fermés de e façon à ce que les gens se voient, mais peut-être pour d'autres raisons et de pas effacer l'histoire ».

¹⁰²⁸ *Idem.* 35:00 mins., original: « Je pense qu'au fur et à mesure que la société évolue, c'est certain qu'il va y avoir toujours des gens qui vont pratiquer, mais je pense que les gens ne pratiqueront pas nécessairement de la même façon. Avant, les gens allaient à l'église, mais maintenant, la vie religieuse ne se vit pas de la même façon et puis ça va changer de plus en plus. Si je regarde mes enfants à moi, ma fille s'est mariée à l'église, je ne peux pas dire qu'elle pratique, mais les fondements restent. Oui, ça va être la même chose pour d'autres religions à moins qu'il soit très fondamentaliste – alors, ça ne changera pas tellement. Donc, je pense que les gens croient à leur façon ».

¹⁰²⁹ See interview with Louis Dumoulin by Ryan Lux, July 8, 2020, 1:08:00 mins., original: « Les anglicans, les protestants, ont mieux géré leur patrimoine, parce qu'ils ont créé des fonds pour l'entretenir. Nous autres, à cause de notre éducation religieuse, nous avons cherché à nous éloigner de toute cette question d'argent, la finance. Ça, c'est plutôt pour les juifs et les Canadiens anglais ».

Catholic religious heritage has been relatively neglected compared to English Canada, for example – a comparison that has yet to be undertaken systematically but could be very interesting.

Nevertheless, Dumoulin said he was not anti-clerical, a perspective he dismissed as facile, conformist, and responsible for many of religious heritage's woes in Quebec. He insisted that religious heritage is important for all Quebecers, whether they practise Catholicism or even believe in it.

Even if we don't agree on who it's about, it's still our beautiful work, paid for by local people. So, I think that what was paid for by the people should be returned to the people, and there's absolutely nothing anti-clerical about that¹⁰³⁰.

For Dumoulin, religious heritage is a moral concern in the sense that it encompasses the lion's share of the nation's artistic and technical achievements but also served as nursery of virtuosity in so many domains. He worried that indifference to religious heritage could erase the best parts of Quebec's distinctiveness.

It makes a link between religion and history. Since the Quiet Revolution, we've been talking a lot about certain abuses, but we mustn't throw the baby out with the bathwater. Here in Quebec City, it's all or nothing¹⁰³¹.

Philippe Chagnon also worried about how Quebecers' ambivalence towards the Church might cost future generations who have no lived experience with churches. Highlighting the fact that nearly every social endeavour for almost 400 years was undertaken under the auspices of the

¹⁰³⁰ See interview with Louis Dumoulin by Ryan Lux, July 8, 2020, 1:05:00 mins., original: *Notre plus beau patrimoine, ce sont les églises et, si on ne les protège pas, on aura une architecture banale avec le décor intérieur très ordinaire, puis rénové au goût du jour alors, c'est une grande perte. Même si on n'est pas d'accord sur ce que ça raconte, il reste quand même que ce sont nos belles œuvres, payées par des gens d'ici, puis contrairement aux communautés religieuses, qui, elles, réinvestissaient l'argent d'ici qui partaient pour Rome. Qu'est-ce que fait Rome avec notre argent? Ils font de belles églises, des beaux palais, et sûrement ils mangent bien. Donc, je pense que ce qui était payé par le peuple devrait revenir au peuple, et il n'y a absolument rien d'anticlérical dans ça.*

¹⁰³¹ *Idem.*, 42:00 mins., original: « *Le patrimoine en général, c'est très fonctionnel, alors que, pour le patrimoine religieux, toutes les formes d'art sont impliquées, la sculpture, la peinture, la mosaïque, l'ébénisterie, la musique, tout. Toute la créativité humaine est là. Puis ça raconte une histoire; ça fait un lien entre la culte et l'histoire. C'est toute une question de civilisation, quoi que la civilisation ait des bons côtés et des mauvais côtés, depuis la Révolution tranquille, on parle beaucoup de certains abus, mais il ne faut pas jeter le bébé avec l'eau de bain, ici à Québec, c'est tout ou rien. Moi, je ne suis pas contre le culte, il y a des gens qui ont besoin de croire* ».

Church, Chagnon described religion as having left an “intense mark on our culture”¹⁰³². He regretted that if contemporary society was incapable of merely maintaining the memory of these spaces, no buildings dedicated to a community vocation on their scale could ever replace them. Likewise, Chagnon warned that destroying them was tantamount to cultural suicide¹⁰³³. Beyond major French-Canadian achievements, for Abbé Gingras, as well as Richard Émond and Jean-François Fortin, religious heritage offered an important narrative thread to understand the spiritual aspect of Nation. For them, religious history means social memory, from a collectivist perspective. Abbé Gingras explained,

[t]hese are the witnesses of history, a history that spans two regimes and still marks our daily lives. And when you see the diversity of monasteries, the diversity of temples, you see the ingenuity of people, you see the development of a culture, you see its evolution¹⁰³⁴.

So, Catholic churches in Quebec are so much more than meeting houses, they are social texts.

For Richard Émond, churches serve as sacred links to the past.

Religious heritage is our ancestors, what they lived through, it's the history of a faubourg, the history of a neighbourhood, it's the history of our ancestors of all those who lived in the faubourg here. It's the history of our elders, and it's the future too¹⁰³⁵.

¹⁰³² See interview with Philippe Chagnon by Ryan Lux, July 6, 2020, 35:00 mins., original: « *Le patrimoine religieux s'impose de plusieurs aspects. Il y a l'aspect historique. Il y a la période française, puis il y a les communautés religieuses - presque tous les hôpitaux au Québec étaient entretenus par les religieuses; l'éducation, c'est par les religieuses, alors la religion a marqué notre culture d'une façon intense* ».

¹⁰³³ See interview with Philippe Chagnon by Ryan Lux, July 6, 2020, 36:00 mins., original: « *Il y a aussi le côté architectural. Les édifices comme ça, on ne pourrait plus les refaire. De laisser aller votre patrimoine architectural, c'est suicidaire. Par exemple, ce que fait Rome, une des villes le plus visitées au monde, c'est à cause de son patrimoine architectural - pas juste les églises, mais aussi les châteaux. Ce qui nous intéresse à la ville de Québec, c'est qu'en Amérique du Nord, c'est une des villes qui a le plus gardé son patrimoine architectural, puis c'est sûr que ça attire des touristes. Puis il y a aussi le côté religieux qui donne le sentiment d'appartenance au quartier et à la paroisse et son lieu naturel de rassemblement* ».

¹⁰³⁴ See interview with Abbé Pierre Gingras by Ryan Lux, July 8, 2020, 47:00 mins., original: « *Le patrimoine religieux, il s'agit de nos églises, de l'Hôtel-Dieu, ou les maisons de l'éducation, les différents monastères. C'est ça des témoins de l'histoire une histoire qui s'étendent sur deux régimes, qui marque encore notre vie quotidienne. Et quand on voit la diversité des monastères, la diversité des temples, on voit d'abord l'ingéniosité des gens, on voit le développement d'une culture, on voit son évolution - alors c'est important, ces témoins-là* ».

¹⁰³⁵ See interview with Richard Émond by Ryan Lux, July 11, 2020, 15:00 mins., original: « *Le patrimoine religieux, c'est nos ancêtres, qu'est-ce qu'on a vécu, c'est l'histoire d'un faubourg, l'histoire d'un quartier, c'est l'histoire de nos ancêtres, de tous ceux qui ont résidé dans le faubourg ici. C'est l'histoire de nos anciens et c'est le futur aussi : de remettre aux générations futures ces bâtiments aussi beaux que ça* ».

Jean-François Fortin likewise associated religious heritage and memory and suggested that churches are vessels of national identity.

City councillor Jean Rousseau approached the concept of religious heritage from a political perspective. He lamented that Quebec City and its residents had not been more daring in its stewardship of religious heritage; “what's always a pity is when you start from a premise that you can't keep them all. We don't have a global vision of all our religious heritage”¹⁰³⁶. Rousseau suggested they probably could and wondered aloud why the City could not muster the same enthusiasm as in the 1970s around the restoration of Place Royale, perhaps under the guise of an environmental movement¹⁰³⁷. For that to happen, Rousseau said, one needs to develop a sense of belonging across a variety of stakeholders. “It's behind the scenes that churches are saved. We need enough influential members of the community to take specific action”¹⁰³⁸. But for that to happen, Jacques Plante warned that there needs to be a paradigm shift away from seeing heritage as a burden but instead a critical resource, as cultural repositories, especially in an increasingly secular society where memory of religion is increasingly retreating from daily life¹⁰³⁹.

¹⁰³⁶ See interview with Jean Rousseau by Ryan Lux, July 8, 2020, 4:00 mins., original: « *L'ancien directeur du Musée de beaux-arts a évalué un certain nombre d'églises. Ce qui est toujours dommage, c'est quand on parle de promesse qu'on ne peut pas toutes garder. On n'a pas une vision globale, de l'ensemble du patrimoine religieux. Je dirais même que la simple reconnaissance du patrimoine religieux soit classée ou non, on a une myopie. On se dit que ça coûte trop cher. Mais au contraire, ces bâtiments-là sont beaucoup plus durables et beaucoup mieux construits* ».

¹⁰³⁷ See interview with Jean Rousseau by Ryan Lux, July 8, 2020, 34:00 mins., original: « *Alors, le défi collectif, c'est de ramener le patrimoine à l'avant-garde. On pourrait se réapproprier ces espaces-là, sous le chapeau environnemental. Le rapport de vérificateur général de Québec, c'est le patrimoine! C'est un scandale. On est toujours en train de trouver les excuses* ».

¹⁰³⁸ See interview with Jean Rousseau by Ryan Lux, July 8, 2020, 31:00 mins., original: « *Justement, c'est de développer le souci d'appartenance qui permettra de travailler avec les leaders de la communauté pour justement faire en sorte qu'on puisse sauver ce bâtiment. Comme politicien, c'est de savoir quand et comment mettre la pression politique sur le municipal, sachant que ce n'est pas seul le patrimoine qui sauve les bâtiments. Il faut suffisamment de membres influents de la communauté qui posent des gestes précis. C'est en coulisses qu'on sauve les églises* ».

¹⁰³⁹ See interview with Jacques Plante, recording II, by Ryan Lux, July 10, 2020, 5:00 mins., original: « *Le patrimoine n'est pas vu comme étant une valeur ajoutée. C'est un fardeau. Et donc, de mettre l'argent dans un*

(3) *Laïcité*

Secularism in Quebec, in the form of official secularism or *laïcité*, inevitably leads to discussions of other aspects of contemporary religious change: concerns about the future related to growing religious and ethnic diversity, often marked by conservative social values; and worries over accommodation. Participants drew links between their experiences of church closure and rapid cultural change, exclamation points marking the passage from a social order where Catholicism continued to hold considerable symbolic power over the Quebec social imaginary to one where it would be merely one tradition among many. Abbé Gingras worried that

[s]ince we're no longer reproducing, people must come from elsewhere with their own cultures, and since we're not proud of our history, or don't know it, or know it badly or remake it to suit one or the other. There's a difficulty in maintaining. We could say in a few years, we'd be a minority of the French in Quebec, a minority of Catholics with an identity, and even less for Christians¹⁰⁴⁰.

Émond is more optimistic that Catholicism will continue its symbolic importance in Quebec. His version of a secular society is one where Catholicism's legacy as the historical religion of the nation is totally compatible with religious neutrality.

You can't change history. Every street in Quebec City has its own meaning. For those who are against Catholic symbols: Muslims, Jews; our clerics are no longer seen wearing cassocks on the street, nuns are no longer seen wearing their habits. And the Muslims arrive here and then they want to impose their religious rites and their way of life¹⁰⁴¹.

fardeau coûte très cher. Et que les gens ne comprennent pas quoi faire avec, par exemple les nouvelles casernes, on investit des millions pour les restaurer, mais il n'y a encore pas une nouvelle fonction - alors le manque de vision, ce n'est pas juste pour des églises, mais pour l'ensemble du patrimoine. C'est important de rendre le patrimoine accessible, si c'est accessible, les gens vont y aller, ils vont se le réapproprier. Cette année, il nous appartient et tout ça, il faut que les gens sentent qu'ils leur appartiennent ! ».

¹⁰⁴⁰ See interview with Abbé Pierre Gingras by Ryan Lux, July 8, 2020, 1:03:00 mins., original: « Comme on ne se renouvelle plus, il faut que les gens arrivent d'ailleurs avec leur propre culture et comme on n'est pas fiers de notre histoire ou qu'on ne le connaisse pas ou qu'on le connaisse mal, ou qu'on refasse la nôtre pour accommoder l'un et l'autre. Il y a une difficulté à maintenir. Dans quelques années, on sera une minorité de Français au Québec, une minorité des catholiques identitaires et encore moins des chrétiens ».

¹⁰⁴¹ See interview with Richard Émond by Ryan Lux, July 11, 2020, 33:00 mins., original: « La laïcité, c'est ton droit de croire n'importe quoi, n'importe quelle religion, mais sans signe religieux, sans aucun signe religieux. Moi, je suis contre les signes religieux. Les signes catholiques, c'est partout-là, c'est dans l'histoire du Québec, c'est le

Reasonable accommodation, the practice of adapting public institutions to specific cultural (religious) needs of minority populations, became a lightning rod contrasting the imposition of minority religious practices onto a largely non-practising population living in an avowedly secular society. Such careful attention by public authorities for non-Christian religions frustrated many Catholics seeking public support. Abbé Gingras complained that governments were reluctant to invest too much in Quebec's overwhelmingly Catholic religious heritage because they might risk being criticised for showing a preference¹⁰⁴². He called on governments to follow France's example with its religious heritage; an approach he called "intelligent secularism"¹⁰⁴³. Putting it bluntly, Chagnon said that even the avowedly atheist Soviet Union did a better job of protecting its religious heritage, which he noted was a good thing for them because it performed a critical part of Russia's contemporary religious revival.

Now they're still standing and they're full. The State also uses them to cultivate patriotism. The current State is very supportive of churches. Good thing they didn't destroy them all. Even if there were a lot of people with very strange, very extremist ideas, they still didn't destroy their churches. They had been maintained for 80 years, without any worship inside. Even if these people had very extremist ideas, they at least considered churches to be part of their heritage¹⁰⁴⁴.

patrimoine. S'il faut changer tous les signes religieux partout, imaginez tous les noms des rues, il faudrait tout changer. Tu ne peux pas changer l'histoire. Chaque rue a sa signification à Québec. Pour ceux qui sont contre: les musulmans, juifs, nos religieux, on ne voit plus avec des soutanes sur la rue, les religieuses, même chose, on les voit plus avec leurs habits. Et les musulmans, ils arrivent ici, puis ils veulent imposer leurs rites religieux et leur façon de vivre : moi, je suis contre ça ».

¹⁰⁴² See interview with Abbé Pierre Gingras by Ryan Lux, July 8, 2020, 17:00 mins., original: « Comme on est une société religieuse catholique, les gouvernements sont frileux à investir dans le patrimoine religieux, car il risquerait de se faire critiquer. Ça risquerait de montrer leur préférence. Alors ils y vont doucement très doucement ».

¹⁰⁴³ *Idem.*, 43:00 mins., original: « En Europe, il y avait des cathédrales pendant la Deuxième Guerre mondiale qui ont été bombardées et ils les ont refaites. Actuellement, Notre-Dame-de-Paris, on reconstruit. Pourquoi? Parce que c'est un monument, c'est un point de référence, et, en France, même un pays laïque depuis très longtemps. Mais c'est une laïcité intelligente ».

¹⁰⁴⁴ See interview with Philippe Chagnon by Ryan Lux, July 6, 2020, 43:00 mins., original: « Pourquoi est-ce que c'est important de maintenir les églises? Par exemple, la Russie, quand les communistes ont pris le pouvoir, ils prêchaient la destruction de toutes des églises à cause de l'idéologie communiste, ils n'ont pas tout détruit. Maintenant, celles qui restent encore debout, elles sont pleines. Puis l'État s'en sert aussi pour cultiver le patriotisme. L'État actuel appuie beaucoup les églises. Une chance qu'ils ne les aient pas toutes détruites. Même

Quebec is, in fact, an outlier compared to its Western European counterparts in that it provides so little funding for the maintenance of heritage buildings, a situation which means that the overwhelming majority of the nation's architectural achievements and historic sites are in the hands of uncoordinated and chronically underfunded parish councils, which have been fusing together in wave after wave and increasingly dissolving due to financial pressures. Added to the legal patch quilt of parish governance, secularism, as we have seen, has been instrumentalised by successive governments to avoid intervening in precedent-setting cases like Saint-Jean-Baptiste. It can also be used as a leitmotif criticising cultural transformations as Quebec's religious landscape diversifies. Quebeckers seem to look to their religious heritage to support Quebec's secularist mythology by using Catholicism as a *porte-manteaux* for its traditional religious past, a status threatened by the growing visibility and vitality of other religions' symbols. In addition to examining how participants imagined Saint-Jean-Baptiste risked setting politically and financially expensive precedents for the State's future role in managing religious heritage, this section has highlighted how participants also point to rapid cultural change and the ways in which the varying concepts of religious heritage could likewise have long and far-reaching consequences across Quebec, where increasingly top-evaluated churches are looking for lifelines.

F. Concluding thoughts: assessment of stand-off

If the conflict over Rimouski's cathedral could be compared to vicious guerilla warfare, the quarrel in Quebec City over Saint-Jean-Baptiste resembled more trench warfare, characterised by delay and attrition. Afterall, Abbé Gingras did warn people this would not be a case resolved in under five years from the outset. But five years had already passed since the closure when I

s'il y avait beaucoup de gens avec des idées très étranges, très extrémistes, ils n'ont pas quand même détruit leurs églises. Elles ont été entretenues pendant 80 ans, sans avoir de culte dedans. Même ces gens, avec les idées très extrémistes de leurs pensées, les ont tout de même considérées comme en faisant partie de leur patrimoine ».

arrived in the faubourg at the height of the chill between the City and the Church, and the people I spoke to were impatient for at least something to happen. Common refrains expressed regret over the way the closure was initially handled and the bitterness which developed between the Church, Civil Society, and various levels of government, as well as a general optimism that eventually a satisfactory transformation would manifest itself, somehow. Designer, heritage activist, and parishioner, Carole Jacques-Savaria, expressed growing frustration, “[a]fter 5 years, it's time to get involved and re-open this monument. People walk past it and they're always attracted by closed doors”¹⁰⁴⁵.

1. *Worst Case Scenario: Continued Impasse or Demolition*

All participants offered perspective on worst- and best-case scenarios for the conclusion of the impasse, as well as what they would change given hindsight. Jacques-Savaria told me the worst-case scenario would be for the church to remain deserted indefinitely, or for the interior to be desecrated by an inappropriate transformation. “It's like giving someone a present in a beautiful empty box. So, you walk past the box, admire it and then, wondering what's inside, you find there's nothing left”¹⁰⁴⁶. Ultimately, the worst outcome had already been the stuff of waking nightmares for Jacques-Savaria. After living in Saint-Jean-Baptiste neighbourhood, she moved to a building across the street from the former Franciscan Sisters of Mary convent and chapel which was dismantled before her eyes, turning her thoughts to Saint-Jean-Baptiste.

[I]t was terrible for me, because those churches have been home to so many people. They have so many stories. They were built by passionate people, people

¹⁰⁴⁵ See interview with Carole Jacques-Savaria, July 10, 2020, 28:00 mins., original: « *Après 5 ans, il est temps qu'on s'implique et qu'on ouvre de nouveau ce monument-là. Les gens passent devant et ils sont toujours attirés par les portes fermées* ».

¹⁰⁴⁶ See interview with Abbé Pierre Gingras by Ryan Lux, July 8, 2020, 36:00 mins., original: « *La pire, c'est qu'elle reste fermée indéfiniment, ou qu'on préserve une coquille vide. C'est comme offrir un cadeau dans une belle boîte vide à quelqu'un. Alors on passe à côté de la boîte, on l'admire et puis on se demande ce qu'il y a à l'intérieur, on trouve qu'il n'y a plus rien* ».

who put all their heart into it, and to see it destroyed, because it doesn't fall by itself. It's heartbreaking to see a steeple fall¹⁰⁴⁷.

Engineer and churchwarden Philippe Chagnon had a hard time imagining a scenario where Saint-Jean-Baptiste would face the wrecking ball. But he did insist that, should that day ever arrive, Quebeckers should look no further than themselves to assign blame, noting that other churches once considered immune to closure have disappeared before, notably Saint-Coeur-de-Marie¹⁰⁴⁸. After ten years' abandonment,

eventually, it went to the dogs. If all those people who care about the church but don't attend regularly had got involved beforehand, well, the church could have been saved. And I think that, in the end, the church would have been transformed¹⁰⁴⁹.

Local community worker Richard Émond has mourned the series of demolitions that have already taken place in Upper-Town. "When I see a church demolished, my reaction is one of bitterness - it's a page in the history of the district that's being erased. People are angry because they're destroying something that should have community use to build a condo tower for the well off"¹⁰⁵⁰.

¹⁰⁴⁷ See interview with Carole Jacques-Savaria, July 10, 2020, 23:00 mins., original: « *Mon pire cauchemar, que j'avais déjà, c'est qu'elle se fasse détruire. Moi, j'habite en face de monastères, les Étoiles sur la Grande-Allée, l'ancien monastère des Franciscaines-de-Marie, alors je sais qu'il y a des façons de laisser une trace, mais la destruction de l'église de Franciscaines-de-Marie, pour moi, c'était terrible, parce que ces églises-là ont abrité tellement de gens. Ça a tellement d'histoires. Elles ont été construites par des gens passionnés, des gens qui ont mis tout leur cœur à ça, et de voir ça détruit... parce que ça ne tombe pas tout seul. De voir tomber un clocher, c'est déchirant. Pour moi, c'est mon pire cauchemar pour Saint-Jean-Baptiste, parce qu'on ne pourrait jamais construire un monument, un bâtiment avec autant de prestige. a ne serait jamais comparable avec cette église, si jamais elle est démolie* ».

¹⁰⁴⁸ See interview with Jean Rousseau by Ryan Lux, July 8, 2020, 35:00 mins., original: « *Si jamais cette église tombe, c'est parce que nous avons abandonné nos responsabilités, et ça, ce sont les conséquences que les gens ne sont pas prêts à faire* ».

¹⁰⁴⁹ See interview with Philippe Chagnon by Ryan Lux, July 6, 2020, 28:00 mins., original: « *Le pire résultat, c'est que l'église subirait le même sort de l'église Saint-Cœur-de-Marie sur la Grande-Allée. L'église a été fermée, puis abandonnée pendant 10 ans. Puis ça s'est dégradé, puis, éventuellement, elle a été passée au pic. Si tous ces gens qui tiennent à l'église, mais qui n'y assistent pas régulièrement, s'étaient mobilisés avant, bon, l'église aurait pu être sauvée. Et je pense qu'à terme, l'église aurait été transformée. Déjà, je ne suis pas mal sûr. Parce que ce n'est pas un projet qu'on fait en deux, trois ans. C'est un projet de longue haleine. Donc, l'Église a besoin de temps pour trouver un projet viable* ».

¹⁰⁵⁰ See interview with Richard Émond by Ryan Lux, July 11, 2020, 41:00 mins., original: « *Quand je vois une église démolie, ma réaction, c'est l'amertume, c'est une page d'histoire du quartier qui s'efface. Si on prend*

For heritage activist and neighbourhood council member Louis Dumoulin, the answer was simple, the worst-case scenario for any church closure had already been established by the 2005-2006 parliamentary commission on religious heritage, which he participated in (demolition), but he was cautious to warn that getting a transformation wrong can be almost as bad. Dumoulin insisted that the church must remain accessible to the public, something which would not be the case for the traditional arts and trades school. “It has to play a part in the economic, cultural and community life of the area. At the same time, it's a very fragile building, so we can't just accept anything”¹⁰⁵¹.

2. *Do-Over: More consultation and co-operation*

Hindsight is 20-20, and many of the participants said that with its benefit, five years into the closure, they would have changed a thing or two about how it rolled out; most of all, Abbé Pierre Gingras.

If we knew the future, I'd definitely make different decisions. If I had to do it all over again, I'm not sure I'd close it. Because we've lost a whole presence in the neighbourhood, and it costs almost as much as it did when it was open. There's the salary of the sexton who's no longer there, but the rest we have to pay. The reason we closed was to force the government to react. Because of course, when you announce the closure of an institution like that, the government isn't happy. Saint Jean-Baptiste was the venue for concerts, charity work, all the food counters were there and even when we said we were going to rehouse all these organisations¹⁰⁵².

l'exemple l'église Saint-Louis-de-France, l'église va faire place à une maison des personnes âgées. Là, les gens n'étaient pas fâchés, parce que ça va être quelque chose d'utilitaire et communautaire. Mais s'ils la rasent pour faire plaisir à un promoteur, pour construire un tour comme la Grande-Allée, ça c'est autre chose. Les gens sont fâchés, parce qu'ils détruisent l'ancien bien commun pour construire une tour à condos pour les gens aisés ».

¹⁰⁵¹ See interview with Louis Dumoulin by Ryan Lux, July 8, 2020, 38:00 mins., original: « On a déjà participé à une commission parlementaire sur le patrimoine religieux, puis c'est sûr que là-dedans, on s'entend que le pire résultat, c'est la démolition. Il faut que ça soit un endroit qui est ouvert à la population. Il faut que ça participe dans la vie économique, culturelle, et communautaire. Il faut que ça soit un bâtiment qui est ouvert. En même temps, c'est un bâtiment qui est très fragile, alors on ne peut pas accepter n'importe quoi ».

¹⁰⁵² See interview with Abbé Pierre Gingras by Ryan Lux, July 8, 2020, 45:00 mins., original: « Si on savait l'avenir, c'est sûr que les décisions se prendraient autrement. Si c'était à recommencer, je ne suis pas certain que je la ferais, parce qu'on a perdu toute une présence dans le quartier et ça coûte presque aussi cher que lorsque c'était en fonction. Il y a le salaire du sacristain qui n'est plus là, mais le reste-t-on est obligés de payer. C'est pour

Though he was plagued by a few doubts with respect to his strategy, the priest did not assume all the blame for the prolonged closure. Abbé Gingras explained that every conflict requires two parties and insisted that if the Labeaume regime had been more politically courageous and followed through on its initial grandstanding for the church's transformation, Saint-Jean-Baptiste would be open to the public today¹⁰⁵³. Jacques-Savaria pointed to the Quebec government for abdicating the responsibility for the building that it assumed when it assigned the church the highest national heritage ranking. Like Abbé Gingras she questioned the shock and awe approach to negotiating the temple's future. "I would have liked everyone to talk to each other to find a vocation well before the closure"¹⁰⁵⁴. Émond agreed with Jacques-Savaria but would have liked the consultations to go even further. He would have preferred the public at large to have its say before the closure.

"The best thing would have been to ask people what they wanted before closing it, to consult residents about what they wanted to do with their church. It's not up to the priest to take care of the church. Because it's changing the population"¹⁰⁵⁵.

ça qu'on a fermé pour forcer l'État à réagir. Parce que c'est sûr quand on annonce une fermeture d'une maison comme ça, l'État n'est pas content. Saint-Jean-Baptiste, c'était le lieu des concerts, la charité, tous les comptoirs alimentaires étaient là et, même quand on a fermé, on a eu le souci de reloger tous ces organismes ».

¹⁰⁵³ *Idem.*, July 8, 2020, 35:00 mins., original: « Si on avait été capable d'asseoir toutes les instances autant religieuses que civiles, d'avoir une collaboration plus sereine et plus réelle, on aurait pu facilement sauver ce monument. Le maire est venu à l'église. Il a vu la maison. Oui, il était emballé; il avait même des projets, mais tout ça est tombé parce que ce n'est pas populaire politiquement. Si on avait été capable de mettre en place ce qu'on a rêvé, on n'aura pas eu l'obligation de la fermer ».

¹⁰⁵⁴ See interview with Carole Jacques-Savaria, July 10, 2020, 20:00 mins.

¹⁰⁵⁵ See interview with Richard Émond by Ryan Lux, July 11, 2020, 12:00 mins., original: « La meilleure chose aurait été de demander aux gens ce qu'ils veulent en faire avant de la fermer, une consultation des résidents du quartier... Qu'aurait-il voulu faire avec leur église? Ce n'est pas à un curé l'église. Le pire, c'est de détruire l'église et de construire de gros condos. C'est un peu la tendance, par exemple, on avait « le séjour », des condos de prix modiques et maintenant, ils sont en train de les restaurer pour créer des condos de luxe avec une piscine là-dessus. Ce n'est pas ça qu'on veut, parce que ça change la population ».

He told me he worried the potential transformation of Saint-Jean-Baptiste would further advance the neighbourhood's gentrification and that only meaningful engagement with average residents could prevent that outcome.

3. *Best-Case Scenario: Mixed-use and Mixed Governance.*

Participants largely agreed that one reason for inaction on the Saint-Jean-Baptiste dossier was an all-or-nothing approach and saw the only way to untie the Gordian knot was to return to the approach recommended by the Porter Commission; to bring all parties together in a novel governance model that could avoid setting too onerous of a precedent on any one group. As noted above, city councillor Jean Rousseau favoured a mixed model with a special role for local elites in terms of inspiring confidence in a realistic project as well as demonstrating to the City and Quebec government's residents' buy-in to a future project. He told me the City and Quebec government repeated that they already promised \$30 million, though it is not clear how those millions are being spent. The federal government, he explained, was open to investing, but that it had to respect Quebec's jurisdiction over heritage and, aside from nationalising the church, it had to wait for other levels to proceed. Lastly, the Quebec government was nervous about establishing a precedent. "The private sector isn't interested. But on the other hand, there's this notion of noblesse oblige, of the elite taking charge. I'd say the ideal scenario is to find a form of private patronage that ultimately provides leadership so that the various players can work together. The community has to rise up"¹⁰⁵⁶. He pointed to models from the Anglosphere where elites establish foundations, "where if I want to look good, so I have to give ... but at the same time you have to solicit all the little people in the neighbourhood, which is unusual here"¹⁰⁵⁷.

¹⁰⁵⁶ See interview with Jean Rousseau by Ryan Lux, July 8, 2020, 13 :00 mins.

¹⁰⁵⁷ *Idem.*,

First and foremost, the priority for Rousseau was to re-open the basement to community services and worry about the heritage elements afterwards, which he thought would be easy to set up a committee to carry out. Ultimately, different groups would need to come together out of a certain pragmatic recognition that these monumental churches benefit all sectors of society and, as such, require everyone to keep them standing for future generations. “Churches are our castles, so we have an obligation, and people are prepared to fight to prevent them being destroyed. We need a clear message from the politicians, and, at the moment, I'd say the one with the clearest message, curiously enough, is the federal government”¹⁰⁵⁸.

Philippe Chagnon was also optimistic that a collaborative approach was not only promising but likely inevitable. However, if the Church could not come to terms with other players, Chagnon felt certain that the neighbourhood could not sustain a huge hole in its heart for another five years and the Church would likely be forced to demolish it, although he admitted he did not think the Church would let it get to that point. Whatever project eventually went forward, Chagnon said he hoped the nave and choir would be preserved. The paintings and the Stations of the Cross should be kept he explained but the pews should go.

As far as I'm concerned, the nave, the side aisles and the transept must be kept. So, the vocation itself doesn't matter to me. As long as it does not become a gymnasium where there's no trace of a church, with just plain white walls. You must keep all the decorations but just free up the central part¹⁰⁵⁹.

¹⁰⁵⁸ *Idem.*, 20:00 mins., original: « Donc, il y a quelque chose qu'on pourrait faire en deux temps. C'est à dire trouver un usage pour tout le sous-sol qui est très vaste, de créer un comité qui permettra un financement de cette activité. Tout en essayant de trouver une vocation originale, parce qu'à côté de la richesse patrimoniale, il y a un certain pragmatisme. Les églises sont nos châteaux. Alors on a une obligation et les gens sont prêts à se battre pour éviter qu'on les détruise. Il faut avoir un message clair de la politique. Et, en ce moment, je dirais que celui qui a le message le plus clair, curieusement, c'est le fédéral ».

¹⁰⁵⁹ See interview with Philippe Chagnon by Ryan Lux, July 6, 2020, 57:00 mins., original: « Je suis optimiste qu'il y aura une transformation bientôt, parce que le quartier Saint-Jean-Baptiste, c'est un quartier très vivant. Il y a la densité, mais ce n'est pas juste la densité, il y a la mixité sociale. Il y a des gens de toutes les classes. Il y a beaucoup de touristes, alors d'avoir un trou comme ça au cœur du quartier, ce n'est pas viable. Je pense que soit l'Église doit démolir, ou soit on trouve un projet. Peut-être pas dans la prochaine année, mais peut-être dans cinq

The space would also need to be divided to serve plural vocations for any project to be viable, explained Chagnon, who had many years of experience searching for an elusive transformation as a churchwarden.

All the singular projects to transform the church have failed because there is enough space for 2,500 people. So, we need mixed use. For example, the front part could be preserved for worship, and the other two thirds could be used for exhibitions, a genealogy centre, a reception area, it would be perfect¹⁰⁶⁰.

For sexton Sébastien Lavoie, the most ideal result of the closure process would have been not to have closed it in the first place or if governments and residents had responded to the shock as Abbé Gingras had expected.

Maybe if the parishioners came together more? Got together and proposed solutions? But, ideally, perhaps to have had a more concentrated parish life to wake each other up, I don't know, to light the fire. We would have liked there to have been some kind of awareness, some kind of movement around the church ... It's like a little flame that's still there, still burning. I always dream or hope that at some point there will be wonderful projects. It seems like it's a possibility, but we don't know what to do about it. There's a beautiful stage in the basement where we can always play music. I don't know, a film festival, we don't know but it seems to me that there are possible projects in the air¹⁰⁶¹.

ans. La seule chose pour moi, c'est que l'église ne soit pas trop transformée. Les tableaux, le chemin de croix : il faut les garder. Mais les bancs peuvent partir. Pour moi, il faut garder la nef, les nefs latérales, le transept; il faut les garder. À partir de ça, la vocation ne m'importe peu. Pas les églises gymnases, où il ne reste aucune trace de ce qui est une église, comme un gymnase avec les murs blancs. Il faut garder toutes les décorations, mais juste libérer la partie centrale ».

¹⁰⁶⁰ *Idem.*, 25:00 mins., original: « Tous les projets singuliers de transformation de l'église ont échoué, parce qu'il y a d'espace pour 2,500 personnes. Alors, il faut un usage mixte. Par exemple, la partie en avant pourrait être préservée pour le culte et les autres deux tiers pourraient utiliser pour des expositions, un carrefour de la généalogie, un espace de réception : ça serait parfait. Bref, je crois que le meilleur 'outcome', c'est un usage mixte avec une partie réservée pour le culte, puis le reste utilisé pour d'autres choses, afin que l'église soit autosuffisante ».

¹⁰⁶¹ See interview with Sébastien Lavoie by Ryan Lux, July 10, 2020, 22:00 mins., original: « Idéalement, c'était qu'on aurait pu la garder ouverte, maintenant idéalement, c'est que les différents paliers du gouvernement au mieux s'entendent. Peut-être que si les paroissiens étaient plus soulevés? Pour se mettre ensemble, proposer les choses? Mais idéalement, peut-être pour avoir une vie paroissiale plus concentrée, pour se réveiller mutuellement, je ne sais pas, pour allumer le feu. On aurait aimé qu'il y ait une espèce de prise de conscience, qu'il y ait une espèce de mouvement autour de l'église. Le pire, ça serait des condos, qu'on rase toute la mémoire de cette église. C'est comme s'il y avait une petite flamme qui est encore allumée-là toujours, qui continue à brûler. Moi, j'ai toujours le rêve ou l'espoir qu'à un moment donné, qu'il y ait des projets merveilleux. On dirait que c'est une possibilité, mais on ne sait comment l'accueillir. Il y a une belle scène au sous-sol, on peut toujours faire la musique. Je ne sais pas, un concours de cinéma, on ne sait pas, mais il me semble qu'il existe en l'air des projets possibles ».

Émond was also optimistic that a community-oriented resolution was close at hand, but almost four years and a new municipal regime later, there have been limited developments¹⁰⁶².

In April 2023, The *Institut Canadien*, the organisation responsible for the successful conversion of Old Quebec's Methodist church into *La Maison de la littérature*, presented a feasibility study on the church's potential for conversions to City Council. The report described the Institute's vision for the church after two years of reflection: "The Crossroads" project, which it recommended would

bring together cultural activities, community spaces, multi-purpose halls, an indoor mezzanine promenade, artists' residences, a performance space, and major shows to fuel the imagination and encourage residents and tourists to flourish¹⁰⁶³.

In September 2024, the Parish and the City agreed to the sale for \$175,000, \$100,000 to compensate the Parish for a year of maintenance and \$75,000 divided between the Parish of Saint-Jean-Baptiste and the Coptic Parish of the Coptic Orthodox Church of the Virgin Mary, Saint Mina and Pope Cyril to compensate their previous negotiations, which had been underway for a year and scuttled by the municipal decision to proceed with the purchase¹⁰⁶⁴. But, so far, none of the projected \$34 million in funding has been officially designated for the necessary renovations – projected at \$12 million in 2012¹⁰⁶⁵. But returning to the social actors involved, both participants

¹⁰⁶² See interview with Richard Émond by Ryan Lux, July 11, 2020, 30:00 mins., original: « *Moi, j'ai l'impression que peut-être quelque chose va bouger bientôt, parce que le maire est en train de changer d'optique. Il veut changer tranquillement d'optique, on le voit. Avant, il était pour les gros bâtiments, mais depuis la pandémie, ça a complètement changé l'optique. Puis le maire il veut laisser ... je ne sais pas si c'est son dernier terme, mais il veut laisser quelque chose, Il est beaucoup plus vert qu'il était* ».

¹⁰⁶³ See David Rémillard, « Église Saint-Jean-Baptiste : le Diocèse rappelle l'urgence d'agir », *Ici Québec*, April 25, 2023, (web), consulted November 22, 2023, <https://ici.radio-canada.ca/nouvelle/1974233/reactions-projet-conversion-eglise-saint-jean-baptiste-Québec>.

¹⁰⁶⁴ See David Rémillard, « La ville achète l'église Saint-Jean-Baptiste pour 175,000 \$ », *Ici Radio-Canada* September 9, 2024, (web), consulted December 4, 2024, <https://ici.radio-canada.ca/nouvelle/2103012/eglise-saint-jean-baptiste-achat>.

¹⁰⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

and those who declined to participate. How do they correspond to the typology based on the previous case of the cathedral in Rimouski?

4. *Typology of Saint-Jean-Baptiste: Continuity and Contrast with Rimouski.*

Having sketched a general portrait of the tendencies present in the Saint-Jean-Baptiste case, I will describe how the actors involved relate to the typology proposed to describe Rimouski's closure scandal. Recall, I suggested actors hail from three domains: 1), Religion, 2), Civil Society, and 3), Politics. Furthermore, I advanced that within each domain there is a polarising force which creates opposing positions with respect to religious heritage and the Church's public or national role. Figures emerged in the case of Saint-Jean-Baptiste that exemplify these six figures: 1), Traditional Catholic, 2), Modernist Catholic, 3), Grassroots Civil Society, 4), Institutional Civil Society, 5), Open Secularist Politicians, and lastly, 6), Strict Secularist Politicians.

Beginning with 1), Traditionalist Catholics, who invariably prefer older churches to newer ones, the only representative that I spoke with was Richard Émond. He was shocked by the logic of closing older churches and keeping newer ones. According to his ilk, Churches should fall according to seniority. Tradition was what connected his faith to a church, so the older and more storied, the better. But he was beating a dead horse with respect to Saint-Jean-Baptiste.

At the rectory I got to speak with several 2), Modernist Catholics, a perspective direly lacking in Rimouski. Whereas in Rimouski, I met largely with politicians, grassroots and institutional civil society – resisters to closure, in Québec City I got to speak with actors who had made the decision to close a church. The difference between this type of actor in Quebec City compared to Rimouski would be that they were all members of the church that closed as opposed to victors in keeping theirs open. For Sébastien Lavoie, Jean-François Fortin, Philippe Chagnon, and, of course, Abbé Pierre Gingras, downsizing the Church's real estate portfolio, especially large historic churches,

was a question of survival for Catholic religious practice, period, and that continuing to occupy monumental churches is a decadence that a rapidly changing Church can no longer afford.

3), Grassroots Civil Society was unquestionably represented by Louis Dumoulin, and in a different manner, Carole Jacques-Savaria. Their actions intersect with the Parish Heritage Committee. Dumoulin, who seldom practised, used the committee to participate in the church's destiny, and Jacques-Savaria went from churchwarden to committee member, to *Espace Solidaire* activist. We see the same permeability in Rimouski, where grassroots leader Jacques Landry stacked the Parish Council with his group. There is a natural affinity between grassroots civil society and traditionally oriented Catholics. Dumoulin's approach to organising community consultations, engaging with the press and multiple stakeholders from the bottom up are all classic characteristics of the grassroots *ad hoc* organising.

The fact of grassroots civil society's early presence in the closure followed by their eventual eclipse by governments and the Church not taking them seriously resembles the dynamic present in Rimouski, where an established institution, such as the Canadian Institute, ends up with the power – like the post-renegade Saint-Germain Parish Council, which perfectly exemplifies the figure of 4), institutional civil society. Importantly, the final projects of both cases appropriated solutions initially advanced by the grassroots.

Lastly, with respect to the political domain, Saint-Jean-Baptiste's results challenged my suspicions gleaned in Rimouski, which were that age played a role. In Quebec City we saw the aged Régis Labeaume fall squarely in the strict secularist camp, whereas the younger and more left-wing Jean Rousseau and eventual victor Bruno Marchand, demonstrated open secularist tendencies. Rousseau emerged as a proponent for direct City intervention in the case, disagreeing with long-time mayor and Strict Secularist, Régis Labeaume who claimed the City could liaise but not direct

a transformation. Could it be that a certain relationship to both left-wing and right-wing populism influences political actors' positions on religious heritage? The former on the basis on community collectivism? And the latter on identity grounds? Provincially we saw significant increases in religious heritage funding by the PQ in 2012 and the CAQ in 2019, whereas we saw decreases by the Liberal Party of Québec during its tenure between 2014-2018 and the outright cancellation of the program in 2025 by the CAQ¹⁰⁶⁶.

Unlike the case in Rimouski, which became a very personal vendetta involving most of the city's leading citizens, the conflict surrounding Saint-Jean-Baptiste was mostly about structural disagreements. Specifically, miscalculations about the other's desire to be consulted and to participate in Saint-Jean-Baptiste's transformation, probably because both governments and the Church were so emphatic about wanting to avoid responsibility for the faubourg's massive white elephant¹⁰⁶⁷. But just because they did not want to own the church did not mean parties did not feel they should have a say in how it was transformed. These errors in judgement led to various parties feeling snubbed and slowed progress.

These mostly stemmed from the Porter Commission which clergy told me left the Parish and the Diocese on the sidelines. The Commission, which was tasked with creating a plan to spend \$60 million over 20 years on the city's religious heritage, neglected to consult the Church in any serious way, so when it announced its proposal for a potential project for Saint-Jean-Baptiste while Abbé Gingras was in Europe and without any notice on the parvis, Abbé Gingras and the Diocese were incredibly offended.

¹⁰⁶⁶ See Conseil de patrimoine religieux du Québec, « Rapport Annuel 2003-2024 », (web), consulted December 10, 2024, <https://www.patrimoine-religieux.qc.ca/fr/publications/rapport-annuel>.

¹⁰⁶⁷ Civil society was the exception in this case in its enthusiastic response to re-opening the church, however, it being inevitable that any project would require significant investments from the Church and/or State, that enthusiasm turned out not to be enough to realise its vision of a multi-purpose transformation.

The obstacle, from the City's perspective, was the outright refusal for the Church to dedicate a large portion of its church sales across the entire diocese towards the Trust proposed to finance the preservation of eight large historic Quebec City naves. No one disputed the heritage or architectural value of these churches, or their community significance as critical social infrastructure.

And, frankly, it was not so much about the expense of Saint Jean-Baptiste's individual renovation. Instead, delays in dealing with Saint-Jean-Baptiste, as well as its snap closure, were about using the hugely significant Church as a test to see how governments and society would react to the closure of the kinds of churches which the Church could no longer afford and which Quebeckers would not accept the demolition of, or even significant architectural and artistic changes.

Churches like Saint-Jean-Baptiste, dozens of which are scattered across Quebec, present a dilemma which everyone involved in religious heritage has been watching coming to a head for at least two decades. The example of Saint-Jean-Baptiste could very well finally establish a national model for the nation's most important examples of religious heritage – a responsibility which could eventually cost hundreds of millions of dollars, if not more. The question though is: what have the Church and the State learned from this test case?

Aside from its experience as a potentially precedent-setting case, other questions are posed by Saint-Jean-Baptiste's closure. First, Abbé Gingras warned Quebeckers when he closed the church that its fate would not be decided in short order. What should the time span be for the transformation of monumental churches? Another question is how we ritualise closure over this period. Saint-Jean-Baptiste was very innovative in that it held special ceremonies designed to let parishioners remember and grieve the church. How can these be adopted civically and religiously? Finally, how can the way Quebec as a society decides how to traverse the inevitable transformation

of some of its monumental churches reflect if and how it can resolve its paralytic ambivalence to its religious past? One alternatively referred to as triumphant or conformist.

VII. Chapter 5: Case III, Description of Saint-Edmond-de-Grantham

A. Introduction



Figure 7 Saint-Edmond-de-Grantham church.

Just because many of Quebec's churches may be small in stature and architecturally insignificant, does not mean that they do not loom large for the small rural communities where they are often the oldest, most beautiful, and only community spaces. Sometimes the impact of their closure makes waves in the national media, which invest them with symbolic significance,

transforming a hyperlocal dilemma into a foil for a phenomenon sweeping across the nation¹⁰⁶⁸.

The tableau is perennially fascinating to Quebecers for whom a church spire looming over a cluster of houses foregrounding rolling farm fields is a stereotype of traditional French-Canadian identity – consider A.Y. Jackson's iconic paintings. Saint-Edmond-de-Grantham fit the mould perfectly. A small agricultural hamlet near Drummondville, Saint-Edmond-de-Grantham made national headlines for its conflict over what to do with its church, one that tore the community down the middle for nearly a decade. Having already lost their *écoles de rangs*, two small schoolhouses serving farm families on separate ends of the parish, their *caisse populaire*, or co-operative bank, as well as their *dépanneur*, or convenience store, the fate of their church was existential for the village's very identity. As the nucleus of the village, the church property evolved

¹⁰⁶⁸ Consider for example national media attention devoted to Saint-Pancôme, a small village in the Lower-Saint-Lawrence featured in *La Presse*, see Isabelle Ducas, « Des laitues pour sauver une église », *La Presse*, April 1, 2018, (web), consulted January 6, 2025, <https://www.lapresse.ca/actualites/201803/31/01-5159413-des-laitues-pour-sauver-une-eglise.php>, or the case of Massueville's church which was featured on *Radio-Canada*'s « Le téléjournal », see Patrice Roy, « L'église à vendre pour 10 000 \$ », *Le téléjournal*, *Radio-Canada*, December 7, 2020, (web), consulted January 6, 2025, <https://ici.radio-canada.ca/tele/le-telejournal-18h/site/segments/reportage/212867/massueville-eglise-histoire-patrimoine-menace-a>.

with time. Town offices and the library were moved into the rectory, and a small community centre was built behind the church. Very little remains of the once effervescent community spirit which once orbited around the church, and for some of Saint-Edmond-de-Grantham's residents, that is just fine.

1. *An historical accident of governance and demography.*

To explain why, it is best to start at the beginning of the parish's history, when some locals urged the bishop not to create a new parish a few kilometres down the road from Saint-Eugène, which was a metropolis compared to the collection of farmers who, until 1918, had to make the trip into several separate parishes for their Sunday obligation, along with everything else. Some parishioners even publicly refused to pay for the added maintenance of another church. But since the land was donated anyways, and the farming families wanted to cultivate a rural society and culture distinct from the four parishes the neighbours were divvied amongst¹⁰⁶⁹, the diocese agreed to annex the territory in 1917¹⁰⁷⁰. Slowly, the perfunctory village institutions emerged: church, rectory, schools, a bank to issue loans for farm equipment, and a general store all huddled where a concession road crossed the diminutive Saint-David River.

Because the region was already settled, when the first municipal census was taken, the rural agglomeration already had 451 residents compared to the present 762 who now reside in one of the few parish-municipalities left in Quebec – the vast majority disappeared when the government

¹⁰⁶⁹ These were Saint-Bonaventure-d'Upton, Saint-Guillaume-d'Upton, Saint-Eugène and Saint-Germain-de-Grantham. Imagine the four parishes as the four corners of a square and the newly created Saint-Edmond-de-Grantham as occupying the central middle space.

¹⁰⁷⁰ See André Pelchat, « L'histoire d'un lieu de pèlerinage dans la région : la grotte de Saint-Edmond-de-Grantham », *Raconte-moi l'histoire*, (blog), consulted January 2, 2024, <https://vingt55.ca/la-grotte-de-saint-edmond-de-grantham-lhistoire-dun-lieu-culte-dans-la-region-raconte-moi-lhistoire-par-andre-pelchat/#:~:text=C%3%A9tait%20en%201858.,du%20d%C3%A9but%20du%20XXe%20si%C3%A8cle.>

forced hundreds of amalgamations in order to rationalise the delivery of local government¹⁰⁷¹. In fact, the village did not exceed 600 people until the 2001 census. The biggest demographic increases took place over the next 20 years as two developments, *Le Nordique*, and another that straddles Blanchard Street, *Le Patelin*, started selling acerages to mostly retired city people who wanted a large spread, a big house, and low taxes. Because Saint-Edmond-de-Grantham was not affected by the amalgamations, it became a destination for people pursuing this lifestyle and nearly 200 of them have settled on desirable woodlots since, to the point where virtually none are left.

Typologically, the closure, and its media coverage put into stark relief the differences opposing the village's Old Stock and the new arrivals, who were largely indifferent to the community's established collectivism, which was what drew people to the church as much, if not more than, Catholicism itself. The church evoked village spirit, informed by an agricultural identity and economy as well as remarkable community life, a spirit best embodied by the grotto to the Lady of Lourdes.

2. *Grotto to Our Lady of Lourdes: A Collective Manifestation*

The grotto was built at the insistence of Abbé Roméo Salois with the goal of constructing an exact replica of the cave at Lourdes where the 1858 apparition of the Virgin Mary appeared to Bernadette Souribous led to the spread of popular Marial devotion. Venerating at improvised grottos became an important popular religious practice during the 19th century across the Catholic world and importantly, for French-Canadians, who used devotion as much for healing as for festive occasions. Pilgrimages provided opportunities to see relatives from further afield, hundreds of

¹⁰⁷¹ Statistics Canada, "Community Profiles: Saint-Edmond-de-Grantham", (web), consulted January 2, 2024, <https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2021/dp-pd/prof/details/page.cfm?Lang=E&SearchText=Saint%2DEdmond%2Dde%2DGrantham&DGUIDlist=2021A00052449100&GENDERlist=1,2,3&STATISTIClist=1&HEADERlist=0>.

whom would come to Saint-Edmond from across the region each August for grand celebrations organised for the Feast of the Assumption¹⁰⁷². Father Salois convinced his parishioners in 1921 to clear a strip of land across the street from the church along the Saint-David River. Parishioners had their doubts that the project would ever be realised to the priest's satisfaction, as the first iteration, built out of canvas and wood, was showing wear by 1925. In response to the deterioration, the new parish priest, Abbé Lavigne, asked each parishioner to bring a stone from their fields to Mass with them on Sunday and organised them into work party teams called *corvées* in French.

The parish, divided into six teams, contributing 40 shifts. Despite the odds stacked against the difficulty of the undertaking and the resources available, everything worked, much to the amazement of the sceptics, who, looking only at the parish priest's weaknesses, kept repeating, 'he won't finish that'. Finally, when everything was finished, when a large Christ had been installed above the grotto in fieldstone, when everyone had brought a stone from their own land to raise an altar, His Excellency Mgr. Brunault deigned to come himself to take possession of the result of so much effort in the name of Our Lady of Lourdes.

In a short amount of time, the grotto, or shrine, became a source of local prestige, drawing crowds of hundreds to the slice of archetypal French-Canadian agricultural paradise. Tens of thousands of people must have visited the small crossroads in the more than one hundred years since the practice began and most of them would have visited the sensible red-brick parish church, its tidy and efficient yard and solid rectory. For years now, the summer Mass is the only religious ritual that takes place publicly in Saint-Edmond-de-Grantham, the result of which is a balm for the loss of the church. The history of the grotto shows Edmondois at their best; their collective creation of a popular religious site out of nothing, their capacity to rally around an ambitious project, one which was progressively embedded into local consciousness. On the other hand, the story of the church's

¹⁰⁷² See André Pelchat, « L'histoire d'un lieu de pèlerinage dans la région : la grotte de Saint-Edmond-de-Grantham », *Raconte-moi l'histoire*, (blog), consulted January 2, 2024, <https://vingt55.ca/la-grotte-de-saint-edmond-de-grantham-lhistoire-dun-lieu-culte-dans-la-region-raconte-moi-lhistoire-par-andre-pelchat/#:~:text=C%C3%A9tait%20en%201858.,du%20d%C3%A9but%20du%20XXe%20si%C3%A8cle>.

demise shows a different side of the small society as divided, petty, jealous, and greed driven. Former mayor Marie-Andrée Auger once described her vision for the way to conduct village government as “family politics”¹⁰⁷³ but the church saga must have reminded her of why the maxim “don’t mix family and business” is so widespread.

3. *Centre of Community Life*

In Saint-Edmond-de-Grantham, if there was conflict over the fate of the church before 2014, it was not as venomous as it would become. Mostly, the church was the site for community-oriented activities. In fact, every Saint-Edmond event happened at least in the shadow of the steeple: hockey, the library, and the small community hall were all right there and even many secular activities, like concerts, notably to raise money for the Parish. For example, the Bassette family used to draw big crowds¹⁰⁷⁴. The grotto was regularly used, given its amphitheatre-like orientation¹⁰⁷⁵, for concerts as well as storytelling and traditional folk culture work shops¹⁰⁷⁶. In 2011, the very active Recreation Committee piloted the construction of a significant community centre on municipal land abutting the church and organised all the programming until 2020, when it dissolved out of frustration with Mayor Robert Corriveau who would eventually lead the forces against the church ¹⁰⁷⁷.

¹⁰⁷³ See Jessica Ébacher, « Saint-Edmond : deux femmes, deux visions », *L'Express*, 42(14), October 20, 2013, p. 8-9.

¹⁰⁷⁴ See « Les Bessette en concert à Saint-Edmond », *L'Express*, October 15, 2006, p.25.

¹⁰⁷⁵ See Gérard Martin, « Pourquoi pas une ballade à Saint-Edmond pour un dimanche tout en musique », *L'Express*, 3(19), July 16, 2008.

¹⁰⁷⁶ « Rencontre avec Jean-Luc Boutin » *L'Express*, 3(50), February 18, 2009, p. 15.

¹⁰⁷⁷ See Jean-Claude Bonneau, « La municipalité de Saint-Edmond-de-Grantham prend la charge des loisirs », *L'Express*, January 10, 2020, (web), consulted January 2, 2024, <https://www.journalexpress.ca/2021/01/10/la-municipalite-de-saint-edmond-prend-la-charge-des-loisirs/>.

But back in 2011, the committee was still vibrant and attracting outside grants to subsidise their plans for a modern community space¹⁰⁷⁸. Social peace reigned until autumn 2012 when Mayor Auger and Parish Council President Bertrand Rivard gave notice to the village council that practising Catholics could no longer afford the church¹⁰⁷⁹.

B. Contemplating Closure: Old Stock vs New Arrivals (September 2012-October 2016)

“The question seems so simple and yet we still don’t have an answer”¹⁰⁸⁰ explained Mayor Auger at a September 2012 press conference announcing that after four years of negotiations between the municipality and the Parish Council, a public consultation was scheduled to take place the following Sunday to evaluate community interest in purchasing the church. Council decided on an informal consultation, citing the high price for a referendum vote. Parish Council President Bertrand Rivard made his preference for the municipality purchase clear when he told reporters, “Either we take it on as citizens, and we take responsibility by preserving the last memory of our ancestors or ... come what may”¹⁰⁸¹. Mayor Auger did not hide her desired outcome either. She used the opportunity to rally Old Stock residents around the church against the increasingly organised group, which had been complicating the municipality’s acquisition of the church. “Can we join hands and make yesterday and tomorrow part of today's story? People of Saint-Edmond, do you care about your church? Join in and I'll be with you!”¹⁰⁸².

¹⁰⁷⁸ See « Le Fonds de la ruralité rend heureuses de nombreuses municipalités », *L'Express*, 39(13), September 25, 2011.

¹⁰⁷⁹ See Gérard Martin, « À Saint-Edmond, le temps est aux décisions concernant l’église », *L'Express*, 40(10), September 9, 2012, p. 32.

¹⁰⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, original: « *La question qui semble si simple n’est toujours pas réglée* ».

¹⁰⁸¹ *Ibid.* original: « *Soit nous nous prenons en main en tant que citoyens et nous prenons nos responsabilités en préservant la dernière mémoire de nos ancêtres, soit... advienne que pourra* ».

¹⁰⁸² *Ibid.*, original: « *Pouvons-nous nous donner la main et faire en sorte qu’hier et demain fasse partie de notre histoire d’aujourd’hui? Gens de Saint-Edmond, vous avez à cœur votre église? Embarquez dans la ronde et je serai avec vous* ».

1. *Old Stock Brokerage: Cooperating to Save the Church*

The idea of *de souche* or Old Stock residents remained a salient one in Saint-Edmond-de-Grantham, so much so in fact, that the municipality's 2021 official urbanism plan acknowledged an original group of 80 families and many of the family names on the list were still very much present on the parish and municipal councils who worked together to find a solution for Saint-Edmond's church¹⁰⁸³. Though I could not find any record of the consultation having taken place, in 2013 an article appeared announcing that the municipality had signed a lease with the Parish Council for 18 months, which would allow the local government to receive various grants. The plan was for a symbolic sale of \$1 and that the village would pay for the costs of transformation. Phase one included removing the pews and renovating restrooms and the kitchen estimated to cost \$18,000¹⁰⁸⁴. The celebration of Mass continued but moved to the sacristy, which was large enough for the handful of regularly observant Catholics. The mayor also announced that the then municipal hall, the old bank co-op, would house the library, at that point housed in the rectory, and that all the municipal regalia would be transferred to the church, where council meetings would be held beginning in two weeks.

The municipal election later that year can be seen as the first evidence available for what the majority of villagers wanted to do with the church. Two candidates, the incumbent Auger, and sitting councillor, Claire Grenier-St-Sauveur, had distinct visions for the church and respectively represented the two factions. For Auger, the church topped her list of priorities, while Grenier-St-Sauveur promised only to pursue the transformation according to residents' ability to pay, meanwhile she prioritised developing the lands behind the church for new residential construction.

¹⁰⁸³ See Municipalité de Saint-Edmond-de-Grantham, *Plan d'urbanisme*, 2021, p. 5, (web), consulted January 5, 2024, <https://www.st-edmond-de-grantham.qc.ca/file-9717>.

¹⁰⁸⁴ See Gérard Martin, « La municipalité de Saint-Edmond devient locataire de l'église », *L'Express*, 41(40), April 23, 2013, p. 19.

Betraying her ideological position, Grenier-St-Sauveur opposed moving the library from the old bank co-op to the church, as she deemed the building inadequate for the purpose¹⁰⁸⁵, although it is important to note that she comes from an Old Stock farmer family and never outright opposed the project on principle. The 2013 election results seemed to endorse incumbent Marie-Andrée Auger's preference for transforming the church into a community centre, giving the former mayor 254 votes of the 340 votes cast, or just under three-quarter of the votes marked for the election, which had a turnout rate of 61.6 per cent¹⁰⁸⁶. The only problem was that, almost in the same breath as accepting her victory, the re-elected mayor had to break the news that the funding from the Québec government anticipated for the church had fallen through. This emboldened the opposition.

2. *Change of Fortune: Anti-spending Grassroots Opposition*

It did not take long for the Newcomer faction to take the offensive in November 2014 and challenge the project to purchase the church, which had already been initiated several months prior, in one of what would become a regular stream of missives by Huguette Alie-Désilets. Her first letter to the editor explained that homeowners in one of the suburban developments, where she had recently built a house, resented the new council's refusal to subsidise their residential investment through road and irrigation improvements as well as opening up new development¹⁰⁸⁷. She saw the willingness to renovate the church versus promoting development as a zero-sum decision and claimed that the municipality should favour residential development instead of saving

¹⁰⁸⁵ See Jessica Ébacher, « Saint-Edmond : deux femmes, deux visions », *L'Express*, 42(14), October 20, 2013, p. 8-9.

¹⁰⁸⁶ See Jonathan Habashi, « Saint-Edmond opte pour la continuité », *L'Express*, 8(33), November 6, 2013, p. 36.

¹⁰⁸⁷ See Huguette Alie-Désilets, « Que faire de l'église de Saint-Edmond? », *L'Express*, November 16, 2014, (web), consulted January 3, 2024, <https://www.journalexpress.ca/2014/11/14/que-faire-de-leglise-de-saint-edmond..>

the old church¹⁰⁸⁸. Recall that the same dichotomy first emerged in the race between Auger and Grenier-St-Sauveur.

Alie-Désilets explained her growing frustration with the location of the council chambers in the nave of the church in another letter penned in June 2015 after the move. “The presenter and project manager told us that this was a very special place, especially on a Sunday, and that it was, in a way, the soul of the Parish [municipality]. I find this religious spirit a little outdated ... a modest community hall project is what we need, without it being in the shadow of a steeple”¹⁰⁸⁹. She offered readers a detailed portrait of how she experienced council meetings in the church, which I will cite in full because of its richness:

I find this room unnecessarily large, poorly lit and barely heated in winter. What's more, the religious symbols - including the old confessional, the balustrade, the pious life-size image of Jesus left in front of the altar, the peaceful dove lonesome on a wall - have nothing to attract young people who aspire to more modernity, nor anything to please their elders who have struggled to free themselves from religious constraint, governed by fear and guilt and with which they grew up. Are these "old-fashioned" symbols appropriate in such circumstances? They should, if you ask me, be put back in the closet by the hall's caretaker before any public gathering that is not religious in nature¹⁰⁹⁰.

Less than a week later, Newcomer, Reynald Girard and Old Stock real estate agent Manon Rodier, presented the municipal council with a petition signed by 311 residents demanding a consultation

¹⁰⁸⁸ See Jean-Pierre Boisvert, « De la discorde autour de l'église de Saint-Edmond », June 4, 2015, (web), consulted September 4, 2025, <https://www.journalexpress.ca/actualite/de-la-discorde-autour-de-leglise-de-saint-edmond/>.

¹⁰⁸⁹ See Huguette Alie-Désilets, « Une modeste salle communautaire à l'ombre d'un clocher », *L'Express*, June 6, 2015, p. 4.

¹⁰⁹⁰ See Huguette Alie-Désilets, « Que faire de l'église de Saint-Edmond? », *L'Express*, November 16, 2014, (web), consulted January 3, 2024, <https://www.journalexpress.ca/2014/11/14/que-faire-de-leglise-de-saint-edmond/>. original: « Je trouve cette salle inutilement trop vaste, mal éclairée et à peine chauffée l'hiver. De plus, les symboles religieux, l'ancien confessionnal, entre autres, la balustrade, l'image pieuse d'un Jésus grandeur nature oubliée devant l'autel, la paisible colombe esseulée sur un mur, n'ont rien pour attirer les jeunes qui aspirent à plus de modernité, ni rien pour plaire à leurs aînés qui sont parvenus difficilement à se libérer d'une contrainte religieuse régentée par la peur et la culpabilité et avec laquelle ils ont grandi. Ces symboles 'vieillots' conviennent-ils en pareilles circonstances? Ils devraient, quant à moi, être remis au placard par le locateur de la salle avant chaque rencontre publique qui n'est pas à caractère religieux ».

by secret vote to decide the future of the church. They also insisted that all the records related to the acquisition be made public. Council initially agreed to hold the referendum in August but pushed it back to October 2015 due to problems with architects¹⁰⁹¹.

Members of the parish council responded with a public relations campaign via an open letter, linking the preservation of the church and its role for fostering local identity to the upcoming parish centennial. The author of the letter, written on behalf of the parish council asked Edmondois to use the centennial to scale back the polemic surrounding the church; “[w]ill these events be occasions to celebrate pride and belonging to a community, or will they be occasions to celebrate the end of that community through the settling of discordant family feuds?”¹⁰⁹². He was referring to the clan dimension of the conflict, which was not reported in the media, but which will be discussed in detail in the next chapter dedicated to my ethnology from the field. Briefly, the conflicts are between Old Stock, who are all variously linked to each other and have come to lead the opposing factions of Old Stock and Newcomers whose interests are at odds with respect to the church. He was also critical of the press, which he blamed for failing to consider the importance of the church as a connection across generations. “The media debate surrounding the church and the future community orientation of its use demonstrate the opposite and tends instead towards a future without a past and a tomorrow of scattered isolated actions”¹⁰⁹³

¹⁰⁹¹ See Cynthia Giguère-Martel, « Église de Saint-Edmond : la consultation publique repoussée en octobre », *L'Express*, 11(23), August 19, 2015, p.6.

¹⁰⁹² Michel Côté, « L'église de Saint-Edmond marquera l'histoire : comment? », *L'Express*, 11(26), September 9, 2015, p.6., original : « *Ces événements seront-ils des occasions de fêter la fierté et l'appartenance à une communauté ou plutôt des occasions de fêter la fin de celle-ci par des regroupements d'intérêts familiaux discordants* ».

¹⁰⁹³ *Ibid.*, original: « *le débat médiatique entourant l'église et l'orientation communautaire future de son usage fait la démonstration contraire et tend plutôt vers le futur sans passé et un lendemain parsemé d'actions isolées* ».

3. *Political Machinations and Clan Mentality*

In October, the public consultations finally got underway, as promised in August. The article announcing the consultations could not have helped the cause of preservation, as it cited dubious soaring cost figures and lower than expected capacity¹⁰⁹⁴. In any case ballots were sent out in the form of post cards. When they were counted, instead of leading what many expected to be a silent majority for the church, it turned out the outspoken minority active in the public sphere did, in fact, speak for the majority of residents, with 111 votes for saving the church and 252 preferring its demolition¹⁰⁹⁵. In her New Year's review of the year, Auger, the mayor of ten years, who had poured her heart into saving the church at all costs, was clearly deflated. "It's an issue that has demanded a great deal of energy and brought controversy. We're now heading for what, we don't know, an extension to our current building, a new hall, we don't know yet"¹⁰⁹⁶. For what some claim to be a result of stress related to the church file, Auger resigned and moved away from town. Another councillor also resigned, which meant that two seats would have to be filled in a by-election, which took place on October 16, 2016.

In September, the lack of action on the consultation had Huguette Alie-Désilets' skin crawling. She chastised her fellow villagers for being indoctrinated by partisans of the church, comparing its suitability for civic and religious functions to the compatibility of water and oil. Alie-Désilets accused the municipal and parish councils of a conspiracy to continue with the sale after news of

¹⁰⁹⁴ See Jean-Pierre Boisvert, « Église de Saint-Edmond : consultation publique la semaine prochaine », *L'Express*, October 8, 2015, (web), consulted January 3, 2023, <https://www.journalexpress.ca/2015/10/08/eglise-de-saint-edmond-consultation-publique-la-semaine-prochaine/>.

¹⁰⁹⁵ See Jean-Pierre Boisvert, « Église de Saint-Edmond : au diable la consultation publique », *L'Express*, 45(13), September 11, 2016, p. 9.

¹⁰⁹⁶ Marie-Andrée Auger, « On va de l'avant à Saint-Edmond », *L'Express*, December 29, 2015, (web), consulted January 3, 2024, <https://www.journalexpress.ca/2015/12/28/on-va-de-lavant-a-saint-edmond/>, original : « *C'est un dossier qui a demandé beaucoup d'énergie et qui a amené de la controverse. On se dirige maintenant vers quoi, un agrandissement de notre bâtiment actuel, une nouvelle salle, on ne sait plus encore* ».

the project had been awarded a grant from Quebec's rurality fund¹⁰⁹⁷. Before that by-election, however, the council voted to approve the purchase of the church for \$55,000 at an extraordinary council meeting (unscheduled), a sum which left many residents confused given that they had just agreed to reject the purchase for \$1. Deputy Mayor Catherine Tubie refused to sign the document out of deference to the consultation, though that abstention did not legally prevent the sale under Quebec's Municipal Code. The decision came in the wake of an August 2016 Parish Council decision to substantially increase rent, to account for necessary repairs, for a long-term lease, beyond the 18 months initially planned. They sought \$2,500 a month for six years, or a sum of \$30,000 a year, a figure which they suggested was fair if they were responsible for heat and repairs for the long-term. So instead, the council took the plunge and used the Rurality Fund money to absolve them of the consultation results. The \$55,000 would be used to cover repairs affected by the Parish to convert it into what had quickly become a vibrant community centre, primarily used, importantly, by the largely retired Old Stock residents¹⁰⁹⁸. Proponents of the sale insisted that the purchase would be covered by the excise tax (gas tax, alcohol sales, etc.) and that given the grants available for church conversions and religious heritage, the deal would benefit ratepayers¹⁰⁹⁹.

The deal, however, hung in the balance as the two clans faced off to fill the two vacant seats on the municipal council. For the mayoral position, Robert Corriveau stood for the anti-church tribe; he was opposed by Aliette Lajoie in favour of the church. The empty council seat was contested against the church by Jules Corriveau and for it by Ginette Letendre. Corriveau argued that "I'm

¹⁰⁹⁷ See Huguette Alie-Désilets, « Citoyens de Saint-Edmond, réveillez-vous! », *L'Express*, September 7, 2016, (web), consulted January 3, 2024, <https://www.journalexpress.ca/2016/09/07/citoyens-de-saint-edmond-reveillez-vous/>.

¹⁰⁹⁸ See Jean-Pierre Boisvert, « Église de Saint-Edmond : au diable la consultation publique », *L'Express*, 45(13), September 11, 2016, p. 9.

¹⁰⁹⁹ See Jean-Pierre Boisvert, « Église de Saint-Edmond : une séance extraordinaire ce mercredi », *L'Express*, 14(25), September 14, 2016, p. 3.

against the purchase of the church, but, above all, I'm against the actions that took place behind the scenes. I want to bring a healthy and productive social climate back to council. Another public consultation with all the facts in hand is not out of the question"¹¹⁰⁰. For a by-election, never mind a municipal election with a history of acclamations, the turnout of 64 per cent was telling of how deeply divided the village was over the issue of its church. Corriveau won the day with 256 votes against Lajoie's 140, while Lafleur won by a similar proportion against his opponent, Letendre, 247 to 148 – it was a democratic exercise which would ring the death knell for the church of Saint-Edmond¹¹⁰¹.

C. Robert Corriveau: The Developer's Pawn

Even though Robert Corriveau's family was among the first settlers of what would eventually become the Saint-Edmond Parish, his interests in real estate development promotion meant that he was the natural ally of an ascendent outside suburbanite tribe. They were growing more and more numerous, while fewer and fewer people lived on farms, tipping the balance in their favour, giving Corriveau unprecedented power granted that he was not beholden to his Old Stock constituents. In an interview following the election, Corriveau explained how residents came to him asking him to run and, given the sorry state he thought local government to be in, he could not refuse, even if he knew what he was getting himself into.

I admit it's not easy. Especially during the caucus [which precedes the council meeting] when things get hectic. Mme. Auger was harassed and made ill by these caucuses. I want us to take our time in this matter and think about our children

¹¹⁰⁰ See Jean-Pierre Boisvert, « Élections partielles à Saint-Édmond : l'enjeu principal c'est l'église », *L'Express*, September 27, 2016, (web), consulted January 4, 2023, <https://www.journalexpress.ca/2016/09/27/elections-partielles-a-saint-edmond-lenjeu-principal-cest-leglise/>.

¹¹⁰¹ See Jean-Pierre Boisvert, « Élections à Saint-Edmond : victoire de Corriveau et Lafleur », *L'Express*, 14(28), October 5, 2016, p. 5.

and grandchildren, whom we're going to put into serious debt if we don't think things through. I want us to stop asking ourselves who's going to win¹¹⁰².

Corriveau claimed one of his greatest motivations was to restore peace to the council, but his actions show that he was just as determined to win the bucolic village's civil war as much as any of those employing their best tactics to keep Saint-Edmond's steeple standing. Corriveau promised to go all the way to the chancellery to petition the bishop to apply pressure on the Parish to rescind its intention to sell. That's because the council had already approved a motion to purchase the church and its lands for \$55,000 and all they were waiting for was to draw up the terms and conditions for the sale¹¹⁰³.

1. Down but not out: the Old Stock had one trick left up their sleeves

So, the October 2016 by-election results won Corriveau the battle, not the war. He and his new councillor were two against four with respect to the church. Just before Christmas, Edmondois learned that the bishop had approved the sale, meaning that the Parish would receive \$55,000 in exchange for their church, which, from there out, would belong to the parish municipality of Saint-Edmond-de-Grantham – welcome news for the Old Stock faction, who must have thought they scored a coup against the grass-roots Newcomer movement and their populist attempts to block the sale. At least that is what the unusually large audience in the packed church, where the municipal council meeting took place, would have learned if were not for the cacophony of anger emitted by 30 anti-church residents, the insults from whom were sometimes even addressed by the

¹¹⁰² See Jean-Pierre Boisvert, « 'C'est ridicule au bouté' – le maire Robert Corriveau », *L'Express*, 45(18), October 16, 2016, p. 6, original: « *J'avoue que ce n'est pas facile. Surtout durant le caucus (qui précède l'assemblée municipale) où ça brasse pas mal. Mme Auger (l'ex-mairesse Marie-Andrée) a été bardassée et elle s'est rendue malade à cause de ces caucus-là. Moi, je veux qu'on prenne notre temps dans cette affaire et qu'on pense à nos enfants et à nos petits-enfants que nous allons endetter sérieusement si on n'y réfléchit pas comme il faut. Je veux qu'on n'arrête de se demander qui va gagner* ».

¹¹⁰³ *Ibid.*

local politicians, who were also, after all, their close neighbours¹¹⁰⁴. The journalist in attendance only understood the details of the deal after seeking clarification following the meeting from councillor Claude McClure. McClure explained that since the \$1 offer in 2014, the Parish has had to replace the plumbing, electrical system, heating system, fire alarm and sprinkler system, and the exterior brickwork. With considerable donation of materials and labour from the pro-church faction, that work came to a total of \$95,000. Given that the Parish had a reserve of \$20,000 at the time of its fusion, and instead of redistributing that amongst residents (members of the Parish), the Parish deducted that figure, as well as another \$20,000 to rent the sacristy for worship¹¹⁰⁵. This reflects the mentality of the Old Stock clan, many of whom were active with both the municipality, the recreation committee and the Parish, which was that the constituents of the municipality and the Parish were one and the same, so what difference would it make to use both institutions' capacities to serve the community. What they failed to anticipate was that many residents did not feel any strong connection between their community and the church building.

The bishop still had to agree to desacralise the church before the transfer could be officialised. Mgr. André Gazaille, bishop of Nicolet, must either have had a flair for the dramatic, or he took into account the charged nature of the situation, because he announced to the press that he would take several weeks of reflection before he would render a final decision¹¹⁰⁶. Mgr. Gazaille had an unprecedented year in 2016 for the diocese of Nicolet had to profane four churches, with Saint-Edmond joining the ranks of: Saint Marjorique (demolished), Saint-Pierre (mixed civic and

¹¹⁰⁴ See Jean-Pierre Boisvert, « Église de Saint-Edmond : l'offre d'achat à 55 000 \$ est adoptée », *L'Express*, December 20, 2016, (web), consulted January 4, 2024, <https://www.journalexpress.ca/2016/12/20/eglise-de-saint-edmond-loffre-dachat-a-55-000-est-adoptee/>.

¹¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁰⁶ See Jean-Pierre Boisvert, « Église de Saint-Edmond : l'évêque décidera au début de janvier », *L'Express*, December 22, 2016, (web), consulted January 4, 2024, <https://www.journalexpress.ca/2016/12/22/eglise-de-saint-edmond-leveque-decidera-au-debut-de-janvier/#:~:text=C'est%20au%20d%C3%A9but%20du,-Edmond-de-Grantham.>

religious use), and Saint-Philippe (commercial transformation)¹¹⁰⁷. Before 2016, the diocese had only closed ten other churches since closures began in the late 1990s¹¹⁰⁸, and it had more priests per capita, and importantly higher rates of ordinations than other Quebec dioceses¹¹⁰⁹.

Reactions from both camps were printed in *L'Express*, a Drummondville daily newspaper. Avid letter writer and notable opponent of the sale, Huguette Alie-Desilets, called the bishop's decision to support the sale, "an insult to democracy!" and denounced his lack of respect to democratic will as "a clear demonstration of the clergy's stranglehold on citizens' freedom to act"¹¹¹⁰. On the other hand, defeated mayoral candidate and former councillor Aliette Lajoie wrote in to congratulate her former colleagues for their tenacity and insisted on the financial prudence of the now-completed agreement despite accusations otherwise.

In 2013, six duly elected councillors wanted to continue the process begun by the previous council. Today, there are only four, and they have succeeded, against all odds, in bringing this project to a successful conclusion, despite the pitfalls and systematic opposition of the new mayor and a few citizens who were able to convince others to follow suit¹¹¹¹.

For the politically established Old Stock families, opposition to what they saw as a win-win outcome was the result of manipulation by a restrained group of people with personal motivation, whether financial, ideological, or caprice. Lajoie's letter seems to assume the matter settled and

¹¹⁰⁷ See « L'église de discorde », *L'Express*, 45(18), October 16, 2016, p.1.

¹¹⁰⁸ See Jean-Pierre Boisvert, « Église de Saint-Edmond : l'offre d'achat à 55 000 \$ est adoptée », *L'Express*, December 20, 2016, (web), consulted January 4, 2024, <https://www.journalexpress.ca/2016/12/20/eglise-de-saint-edmond-loffre-dachat-a-55-000-est-adoptee/>.

¹¹⁰⁹ Canadian Conference of Bishops, *Catholic Church Directory*, Novalis, 1980-2023.

¹¹¹⁰ See Huguette Alie-Désilets, « Le dossier de l'église de Saint-Edmond : une insulte à la démocratie! », *L'Express*, February 9, 2017, (web), consulted January 4, 2023, <https://www.journalexpress.ca/2017/02/09/le-dossier-de-leglise-de-saint-edmond-une-insulte-a-la-democratie/>, original: « une preuve évidente de l'emprise du clergé sur la liberté d'agir des citoyens ».

¹¹¹¹ See Aliette Lajoie, « Mes collègues du conseil ont été tenaces », *L'Express*, February 7, 2017, (web), consulted January 5, 2024, <https://www.journalexpress.ca/2017/02/21/mes-collegues-du-conseil-ont-ete-tenaces/>, original: « En 2013, nous étions six conseillères et conseillers dûment élus à vouloir poursuivre le processus engagé par le conseil précédent. Aujourd'hui, ils ne sont que quatre et ils ont réussi, envers et contre tous, à mener à bien ce dossier, malgré les embûches et l'opposition systématique du nouveau maire et de quelques citoyens qui ont su convaincre d'autres ».

indicates that she now believed the community would have to take steps to heal before the centennial celebrations scheduled for that summer of 2017 and the elections in the Fall¹¹¹².

2. *Fall Elections 2017: Faction Face-Off*

The village's political polarisation over the church, first expressed in the 2016 by-election, reached its zenith during the October 2017 municipal election. In a village where candidates are often acclaimed, it is extremely rare to develop political slates, much less have them each to contest all seats, and be perfectly polarised on a single issue. In fact, Saint-Edmond-de-Grantham was one of only two of 18 municipalities in the county where all seats were contested.¹¹¹³ The church's destiny served as a catalyst, polarising the pronounced cultural, economic and political differences between the groups. In this way, it is evident how church closures represent a Total Social Fact, their effects reverberating far beyond the religious sphere.¹¹¹⁴

So, in a village where politics had always been an informal network of family connections, largely consensus driven, the Old Stock, which was used to acclamations, had to get organised to mobilise their influence in the way Corriveau had with the new arrivals. Standing as the mayoral candidate for the Old Stock in 2017's general municipal election was village councillor Claude McClure, leading his slate of candidates under the banner: "The Team of Builders"¹¹¹⁵. McClure, one of the four pro-church councillors, hoped that, by presenting the facts to residents calmly and clearly, that tensions could be eased.

This affair has divided citizens, and it's time to restore social peace in Saint-Edmond. But if we must, we'll lance the abscess. The full version of the

¹¹¹² *Ibid.*

¹¹¹³ See « À Saint-Edmond : Claude McClure veut ramener la paix sociale et gérer sainement », *L'Express*, October 10, 2017, (web), consulted January 5, 2023, <https://www.journalexpress.ca/2017/10/10/a-saint-edmond-claude-mcclure-veut-ramener-la-paix-sociale-et-gerer-sainement/>.

¹¹¹⁴ See Marcel Mauss, *The Gift: The Form and Functions of Exchange in Archaic Societies*. London, Cohen & West, translated 1966, p. 76-77.

¹¹¹⁵ L'Équipe des bâtisseurs.

explanations for the purchase of the church was never able to be expressed clearly, either because some people in the room were heckling, or because the mayor prevented us from speaking¹¹¹⁶.

In contrast, Corriveau issued his platform via press release. His priorities were the road network, followed by streetlights, fibre-optic internet, and residential development¹¹¹⁷ – these kinds of investments would attract more new residents accustomed to urban living and expand the Newcomer power base.

A flurry of letters to the editor were published from each side back and forth during the campaign. Describing the local dynamics reflected by the election campaign, The Team of Builders candidate Josée Marchand, described Saint-Edmond-de-Grantham as a Gaulish village akin to the one portrayed in *Asterix and Obelix*; “I imagined the fish flying in all directions, like in the comic strip, because of internal conflicts concerning a building located in the very heart of the village: a church to be transformed”¹¹¹⁸. Remarking on the national media interest for their little hamlet, Marchand continued the metaphor: “This community must have possessed a powerful potion for all this hubbub to reach the ears of the mainstream media, the Druids of information!”¹¹¹⁹. Not one to miss an opportunity to make her feelings known, anti-church pamphleteer Huguette Alie-Désilets issued an acerbic response.

Let's get back to our times. Too much money is wasted in our municipality on childish things, not to say settling scores, creating unnecessary pitfalls for the population, taken hostage by our leaders once they've been elected. We are all

¹¹¹⁶ See « À Saint-Edmond: Claude McClure veut ramener la paix sociale et gérer sainement », *L'Express*, October 10, 2017, (web), consulted January 5, 2023, <https://www.journalexpress.ca/2017/10/10/a-saint-edmond-claude-mcclure-veut-ramener-la-paix-sociale-et-gerer-sainement/>, original: « Cette affaire a divisé les citoyens et il est temps de ramener la paix sociale à Saint-Edmond. Mais s'il faut, on va crever l'abcès. La version complète des explications de l'achat de l'église n'a jamais été possible d'être exprimé clairement, soit parce que certaines personnes dans la salle faisaient du chahut, soit parce que le maire nous empêchait de prendre la parole ».

¹¹¹⁷ See « Mairie : les deux candidats ont des choses à dire », *L'Express*, 13(33), October 25, 2017, p. 1, 17.

¹¹¹⁸ See Josée Marchand, « À St-Edmond-de-G ... Gaules : une 'Idéfix', celle de la joie de vivre », *L'Express*, October 31, 2017, (web), consulted January 5, 2024, <https://www.journalexpress.ca/2017/10/31/a-st-edmond-de-ggaulles-idefix-celle-de-joie-de-vivre/>.

¹¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*

victims! In my humble opinion, continuing with the church renovation project, regardless of the source of the sums already invested or yet to be invested, is a stubborn idea!".¹¹²⁰

Next it was Team of Builders' Luc Camirand's turn. In his letter he made his team's accusations less opaque, targeting the Corriveau clan's interests in road building and residential development with respect to the land northwest of the church. He emphasised that taxes were supposed to pay for services to residents, not to subsidise developers' bottom lines. "I'm not against development. I think it's possible to support developers within the rules set by the municipality: 100% of the costs are borne by the developers"¹¹²¹.

As Elections drew nearer and as the crux of the issues, already familiar to residents, became clearer, a ruling was issued, just days before voting day, from the Municipal Commission of Quebec in response to complaints lodged by the Team of Builders¹¹²². The claims, now public record, laid bare the village's intrigue when two of its members: mayoral candidate Claude McClure and candidate for council, Jean-Claude Paradis, submitted complaints about the sitting mayor's unethical conduct. The inquiry took place September 26 to 28, 2017, at the Drummondville Courthouse. The court's response to the accusations was concerning without ultimately being damning. According to the facts of the inquiry, Mayor Corriveau had made

¹¹²⁰ See Huguette Alie-Désilets, « Une citoyenne réplique à Josée Marchand », *L'Express*, November 1, 2017, (web), consulted January 5, 2024, <https://www.journalexpress.ca/2017/11/01/citoyenne-replique-a-josee-marchand/>, original: « Revenons à notre époque, trop d'argent se gaspille dans notre municipalité pour des enfantillages, pour ne pas dire des règlements de compte, créant des embûches inutiles pour la population prise en otage par nos dirigeants une fois élus. Nous en sommes tous victimes! ... Continuer le projet de rénover l'église, peu importe la provenance des sommes déjà investies ou à venir, est à mon humble avis une 'idée fixe!' ».

¹¹²¹ See Luc Camirand, « Aux citoyens de Saint-Edmond », *L'Express*, November 1, 2017, (web), consulted January 5, 2024, <https://www.journalexpress.ca/2017/11/01/aux-citoyens-de-saint-edmond/>, original: « Je ne suis pas contre le développement. Je crois qu'il est possible d'accompagner les développeurs dans le respect des règles établies par la municipalité: 100% des coûts sont à la charge des promoteurs ».

¹¹²² See « Enquête de la Commission municipale du Québec : le maire sortant Robert Corriveau blanchi », *L'Express*, November 3, 2017, (web), consulted January 5, 2024, <https://www.journalexpress.ca/2017/11/03/enquete-de-commission-municipale-Québec-maire-sortant-robert-corriveau-blanchi/>.

multiple offers to the Parish to purchase the church, both in his private and public functions, to block the community centre. With respect to Corriveau's private actions, the inquiry found that Corriveau had made personal offers during the summer of 2016, which did not bear fruit. After his election, he propositioned the Parish in his capacity as Mayor but never put anything into writing. Lastly, he approached the bishop in November, following through on his promise to do so in a final effort, and proposed the municipality buy the church to create seniors' housing¹¹²³. While the Commission found that Corriveau had not completely crossed the ethical line due to the fact he was under the impression that his status as mayor gave him the power to thwart the sale, the judge did give the incumbent mayor a dressing down:

"The mayor found himself stuck with this purchase proposal [...] since it was difficult to admit now that his purchase offer was bogus, without losing face. His testimony was therefore ambiguous, made up of half-truths. The Code of Ethics contains the ethical values of prudence and honour attached to functions. The Commission strongly urges the mayor to draw inspiration from it, since his behaviour in this case is not exemplary, even though he is not in conflict of interest¹¹²⁴.

In response, Corriveau issued a statement that he welcomed the ruling with comfort and humility. He explained himself, saying, "In my determination to carry out the mandate entrusted to me by the citizens on the delicate issue of the church, I should have been more cautious"¹¹²⁵.

¹¹²³ *Ibid.*

¹¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, original: « le maire s'est retrouvé coincé avec cette proposition d'achat [...] puisqu'il était difficile d'avouer maintenant que son offre d'achat était factice, sans perdre la face. Il a donc rendu un témoignage ambigu, cousu de fils blancs et fait de demi-vérités. Le Code [d'éthique et de déontologie et des élus] contient des valeurs éthiques de prudence et d'honneur rattachées aux fonctions. La Commission invite fortement le maire à s'en inspirer, puisque son comportement dans ce dossier n'est pas exemplaire, même s'il n'est pas en conflit d'intérêts ».

¹¹²⁵ See Robert Corriveau, « Commission municipale: 'J'accueille avec soulagement et humilité cette décision' », *L'Express*, November 3, 2017, (web), consulted January 5, 2024, <https://www.journalexpress.ca/2017/11/03/commission-municipale-jaccueille-soulagement-humilite-cette-decision/>, original : « Dans ma volonté de mener à bien le mandat que m'avaient confié les citoyens sur le délicat dossier de l'église, j'aurais dû être plus prudent ».

3. *Changing of the Guard: Newcomers' Election Sweep*

After the short time it took to count the villagers' ballots cast in the November 5, 2017, election, it was clear that the Newcomers' former indifference to municipal affairs was no more and that their engagement, sparked by the fate of the country church, had dislodged the Old Stock's hegemony over community life. With a completely unheard-of electoral participation of 80 per cent of eligible voters, Newcomer candidate Robert Corriveau received 285 votes, while Old Stock candidate Claude McClure garnered 174¹¹²⁶, a figure that closely resembled the previous year's mail-in consultation and by-election, 252 vs. 111 and 256 vs. 140, respectively¹¹²⁷. None of the pro-church candidates, who ran under the slate "Team of Builders", were elected and all of them lost by approximately the same margins as McClure, indicating a galvanised fissure running through the village between the old guard and the new¹¹²⁸. That social reality was so widely acknowledged that it appears in the 2021 municipal urban plan¹¹²⁹. The first question on everybody's minds must have been: what does this mean for Saint-Edmond Church? Cryptically, Corriveau addressed the elephant in the room when he announced that "decisions will have to be made for the better"¹¹³⁰.

¹¹²⁶ Note de la rédaction, « De nouveaux visages aux quatre coins de la MRC de Drummond », *L'Express*, 13(35), November 8, 2017, p. 6-8.

¹¹²⁷ See Jean-Pierre Boisvert, « Élections à Saint-Edmond : victoire de Corriveau et Lafleur », *L'Express*, 14(28), October 5, 2016, p. 5. ; and, Jean-Pierre Boisvert, « Église de Saint-Edmond : au diable la consultation publique », *L'Express*, 45(13). September 11, 2016, p. 9.

¹¹²⁸ Ministère d'Affaires municipales et d'Habitation, « Élections municipales 2017 : Résultats pour les postes de maires et de conseillers », November 2017, (web), consulted January 20, 2024, https://www.mamh.gouv.qc.ca/organisation-municipale/democratie-municipale/statistiques-et-archives-des-resultats-des-elections-municipales-2017/resultats-des-elections-pour-les-postes-de-maire-et-de-conseiller/?tx_txmamrotelections2017_pi1%5Bmun_text%5D=Saint-Edmond-de-Grantham+%2849100%29&tx_txmamrotelections2017_pi1%5Bmun%5D=49100.

¹¹²⁹ Le Conseil de la municipalité de Saint-Edmond-de-Grantham, « Plan d'urbanisme », 2021, p. 16, (web), consulted January 21, 2024, <https://www.st-edmond-de-grantham.qc.ca/file-9717>.

¹¹³⁰ See Note de la rédaction, « De nouveaux visages aux quatre coins de la MRC de Drummond », *L'Express*, 13(35), November 8, 2017, p. 6-8, original: « Il y aura des décisions à prendre pour le mieux ».

In his New Year message to the community, Mayor Corriveau highlighted his development priorities for the village, citing the need to attract new families – something which would only expand his political base. He lamented that few lots remained ready for development; “we’re talking about two or three lots”. To change that, Corriveau promised, “[w]e’re planning a new residential development at the end of Notre-Dame-de-Lourdes Street. If all goes according to plan, this new area could be home to around 45 new houses, which is very important for a municipality like ours”¹¹³¹. As for the church, Corriveau was vaguer. “This issue has already gone on too long and divided the population too much. We need to make the right decisions in the interests of the whole population. It’s certainly not an easy task, but with everyone’s good will, we’ll manage to finalise this dossier in the right way”¹¹³². Yet again, we encounter the zero-sum scenario orientation between the decision to either promote development or save the church. The same polemic, which had divided the community since 2014 appeared in black and white in the city’s urban plan. In its section on demographics, the plan noted that 190 people have moved to the community between 1996 and 2016; 89 people moved to the village within a single five-year period of 2011 and 2016 – a crucial period for the church debate¹¹³³. Moreover, it indicated that 29 per cent of homes were built before 1960, figures all of which conform to the electoral divide between what I have been calling Newcomers and the Old Stock¹¹³⁴. As such the choice between

¹¹³¹ See Jean-Claude Bonneau, « Saint-Edmond : un avenir intéressant », *L’Express*, January 4, 2018, (web), available only on Eureka.ca, original: « *Chaque année, de nouvelles familles viennent s’installer à Saint-Edmond et nous voulons poursuivre notre développement résidentiel et notre développement commercial. Présentement, il ne nous reste que très peu de terrains sujets à la construction résidentielle : on parle de deux ou trois terrains qui sont disponibles. C’est pour cette raison que nous planchons sur un projet de nouveau développement résidentiel qui pourrait voir le jour au bout de la rue Notre-Dame-de-Lourdes. Si tout se concrétise comme nous le souhaitons, ce nouveau secteur pourrait accueillir environ 45 nouvelles maisons, ce qui est fort important pour une municipalité comme la nôtre* ».

¹¹³² *Ibid*, original: « *Ce dossier a déjà trop duré et trop divisé la population. Il faut donc voir à prendre les bonnes décisions dans l’intérêt de toute la population. Ce n’est certes pas une mince tâche, mais avec la bonne volonté de tout le monde, nous allons réussir à finaliser ce dossier de bonne façon* ».

¹¹³³ See « Plan d’urbanisme », Le Conseil de la municipalité de Saint-Edmond-de-Grantham, 2021, p. 16, (web), consulted January 21, 2024, <https://www.st-edmond-de-grantham.qc.ca/file-9717>.

¹¹³⁴ *Ibid*. p.17.

development and the preservation of the church was an existential one for both parties: one side wanted to multiply change, and another wanted to conserve the character of the village and prevent it from becoming yet another bedroom community, swallowed up by external forces. The risk was not imaginary. The same document forecast that by 2036, the village's population – which had remained virtually unchanged since its inception – would double to 1012 within the space of 25 years¹¹³⁵. The report went so far as to acknowledge that: “There is a clear divide between more urbanised areas and rural areas in terms of the rate at which households are being created.”¹¹³⁶ Given the context, it was no surprise that residents were waiting with bated breath to discover what the municipal council would do with its now-absolute power over the village – and they had not long to wait.

On July 3, 2018, Corriveau and his team voted unanimously to demolish the church, which the municipality had just purchased for \$55,000, and to erect in its place a large, covered shelter, similar to the types of structures which house farmer's markets¹¹³⁷. The plan was to auction off as much of the church as possible to help defray the still unknown demolition costs, pay for the still uncostered replacement structure, and subsidise the necessary enlargement of the existing recreation hall built in 2011. No contracts had been explored or signed before the decision was made¹¹³⁸. One unnamed resident described the revelation saying, “we're learning about this one drop at a time”¹¹³⁹.

¹¹³⁵ *Ibid.* p.15.

¹¹³⁶ *Ibid.* p. 16, original: « *Un clivage s'opère entre milieux plus fortement urbanisés et les milieux ruraux concernant le rythme de création des ménages* ».

¹¹³⁷ See Jean-Pierre Boisvert, « Des questions sans réponses autour de la démolition de l'église », *L'Express*, 14(34), November 7, 2018, p. 5.

¹¹³⁸ *Ibid.*

¹¹³⁹ *Ibid.* original: « *on apprend ça au compte-goutte* ».

A little more than a week later, the council announced it would proceed with the long-awaited new residential development planned for the lushly forested land behind the church, where it hoped to see 46 new homes built, which was a point of contention between the Newcomers and the Old Stock during the 2013 municipal election between Marie-Andrée Auger and Claire Grenier¹¹⁴⁰. In her 2015 New Year's message, Auger referenced the proposed development and, without outright opposing it, cited her clan's concerns about the loss of the rare, forested space it would replace¹¹⁴¹. The project was eventually refused by the Commission for the Protection of Agricultural Land of Quebec, which Corriveau vowed to have overturned.¹¹⁴²

Sometimes years separate the announcement of a demolition and when the wrecking balls start to swing – not so in Saint-Edmond. By the end of January 2018, the village council announced it had signed a contract for \$195,000 to dismantle the church in mid-February¹¹⁴³. Partisans of the church, some 15 all told, exchanged “muscle” opposition to the unanimous council. Former council candidate in the 2016 by-election, Ginette Letendre insisted, “The logic isn't really there. Spending \$200,000 to destroy a building worth \$300,000. We, the taxpayers, still must pick up the tab”¹¹⁴⁴. In the church's place, the council announced it would be built a “Citizen's Square”¹¹⁴⁵, projected

¹¹⁴⁰ See Jessica Ébacher, « Saint-Edmond : deux femmes, deux visions », *L'Express*, 42(14), October 20, 2013, p. 8-9.

¹¹⁴¹ See Marie-Andrée Auger, « On va de l'avant à Saint-Edmond », *L'Express*, December 29, 2015, (web), consulted January 3, 2024, <https://www.journalexpress.ca/2015/12/28/on-va-de-lavant-a-saint-edmond/>, original: « Ce nouveau projet qui suit les orientations du gouvernement va certainement dynamiser le cœur du village, surtout que les terrains vont garder un aspect forestier avec de beaux arbres ».

¹¹⁴² See Yannick Rochette, « St-Edmond : important projet résidentiel en vue », *Radio Énergie Drummondville*, July 12, 2018, (web), consulted January 21, 2024, <https://www.iheartradio.ca/energie/energie-drummondville/nouvelles/st-edmond-important-projet-residentiel-en-vue-1.4073264>.

¹¹⁴³ See Marilyne Demers, « L'église de Saint-Edmond-de-Grantham sera démolie en février », *L'Express*, January 29, 2019, (web), consulted September 1, 2025, <https://www.journalexpress.ca/2019/01/29/leglise-de-saint-edmond-de-grantham-sera-demolie-en-fevrier/>.

¹¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, original: « La logique n'est pas tellement là. Dépenser 200,000 \$ pour détruire un édifice qui en vaut 300,000 \$. C'est nous, les payeurs de taxes qui encore payons ».

¹¹⁴⁵ *Carrefour citoyen*.

to buoy costs to \$489,000¹¹⁴⁶. They also announced that the recreation hall would not be enlarged due to high costs.

¹¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

VIII. Chapter Six, Case II: Analysis of Saint-Edmond-de-Grantham

A. Introduction



Figure 8 The Demolition of Saint-Edmond-de-Grantham

When I first visited Saint-Edmond-de-Grantham, I honestly did not know what to expect other than that it was a small agricultural village. The decision to pop in and conduct some reconnaissance was a spontaneous one made at the last minute on my return to Ottawa from a July 2020 road trip along the *chemin des clochers*¹¹⁴⁷, or highway 132. Impulsively, I took a detour into the deep countryside of Central Quebec and rambled down back roads towards a barely perceptible place name on the map near Drummondville. I followed the road signs but still had to turn around a few times before I quitted the fertile plains and veered down into a densely wooded, low-lying, deciduous forest. I crossed over what is generously referred to as the David River, more of a brook

¹¹⁴⁷ The “Road of Steeples”, an old two-lane highway which runs along the scenic south shore of the Saint Lawrence River.

really, and into a clearing punctuated by a handful of buildings called Saint-Edmond-de-Grantham. Suffice it to say, the village is easy for an outsider to miss, an obscurity made ever the more so since by the summer of 2020 when I first visited, the vertiginous steeple, which once marked the village on the horizon, was no more than a painful memory for the people who had used it as a way marker for the past 100 years.

1. First Impressions of an Unwelcome Outsider

What remained was the former rectory, now used as the town hall, a small municipal garage, a playground, a small recreation hall, library, an abandoned *dépanneur*¹¹⁴⁸, a few houses and a new park, the ground still soft from recent landscaping, located where the red-brick country church once loomed. My first thoughts were for the logistics of my upcoming field work scheduled for September. Since I do not drive and there was obviously nowhere to lodge, I decided that there was no time like the present to introduce myself to the municipal staff, ask if I would be able to camp behind the rectory, and arrange interviews with the current mayor and other officials. My reception was frosty to put it mildly. “No”, I could not camp, “no”, the mayor would certainly not meet me. The municipal manager also suggested that I forget the idea of studying the case altogether, insisting that residents were finally starting to heal the wounds inflicted upon their community by the tumultuous question of the now-demolished church.

Deflated, but intrigued, I took half an hour to explore the grounds beside the rectory, which now occupied the church’s former footprint. There were large rocks which marked out the church’s old foundation filled in with wood chips and surrounded by a few gardens, a stage, and the freshly polished church bell, mounted on a cement pad, the clapper of which, I discovered, could still be

¹¹⁴⁸General store.

used to sound the precipitated bell. Across the road I noticed a sign leading to a grotto, so I followed its direction and found, to my pleasant surprise, what is perhaps the most interesting and elaborate feature of Saint-Edmond-de-Grantham, their grotto to Our Lady of Lourdes.

Given the public health orders stemming from the pandemic, the grotto had seen better days, but if a person squinted their eyes, it was not hard to imagine how beautiful the site could be and all the devotion that had been invested in it over the years. There were piles of benches which had likely had not been touched since volunteers prepared the grotto for winter the previous autumn. Further down into the little glen stood a 15- to 20-foot-high replica, built of field stones, of the cave where the Virgin Mary appeared to Saint-Bernadette-Soubirous in 1878 France. Inside, there was a statue of Our Lady and alcoves for candles and pots of flowers. Behind it was a landscaped path featuring several wooden shrines. My general impression of the site was that it was a sincere expression of popular devotion, like Notre-Dame-du-Cap – where I just visited in Trois-Rivières – but on a much smaller scale, albeit just as grand if one considers the vastly fewer resources available to create and maintain Saint-Edmond’s version. Having explored the surprising discovery, I crossed back over the small bridge, ambled back up the hill to the road and resumed the trip back to Ottawa, where I would spend the next month contemplating my return to the enigmatic village, which demolished its church, but so clearly had a recent and perhaps ongoing deep connection to popular religious practices.

2. *Field work: A Regional Solution to Logistical Problems*

Given the nature of Saint-Edmond-de-Grantham, a hyperlocal approach to the church closure would have been both logistically impossible and would have obscured the case from its highly pertinent regional context, so I decided to make Drummondville the base of my operations and rented a downtown apartment on Brock Street. My train arrived in the Central Quebec hub in the

early afternoon, which gave me time to take in the town before checking in to my lodgings. It was my first time in Drummondville, and I was impressed by its downtown's rich architectural and religious heritage, which testified not only to its early prosperity, but also the city's distant English origins. Once installed on Brock Street, I set to work contacting the only two subjects who had confirmed interviews. Abbé Gilles Dubois and Aliette Lajoie. I booked a cab for the following day to take me to Saint-Germain-de-Grantham, a village between Drummondville and Saint-Edmond-de-Grantham, where I met with Abbé Gilles Dubois, the priest responsible for Notre-Dame-de-Lourdes Parish, which comprised the churches of Saint-Germain, Saint-Eugène, and Saint-Edmond-de-Grantham.

Unlike Saint-Edmond-de-Grantham, Saint-Germain looks like how one might imagine a prosperous Quebec agricultural village. Saint-Germain takes obvious pride in its well-kept and beautiful field stone church and the tidy rectory with its balcony overlooking the school yard. Across from the church sits an immaculately landscaped park presided over by a large statue of Mary Queen of the World. Notre-Dame Street, the main street, is lined with a few shops, a post office, and a little restaurant. On the edges of town, there are a few big agricultural enterprises which provide a bulwark against the town being simply a bedroom community of Drummondville.

This is where I met Abbé Dubois and Aliette Lajoie, who organised various clubs and community activities in Saint-Edmond, as well as sat on the municipal council and ran for mayor in the 2016 by-election. Both participants were instrumental in introducing me to other interview subjects. Abbé Roy connected me with parish council President Michel Côté who dealt with the Parish side of Saint-Edmond's church's sale to the municipality. Lajoie convinced Jean-Claude Paradis to agree to speak with me. He is a large-scale poultry farmer, former councillor, and instrumental organiser of the church's transformation into a community centre. Lajoie also helped to secure an

interview with a dedicated leader of the Saint-Edmond Parish, Ginette Letendre. Both Paradis and Letendre were initially reluctant to involve themselves in the study given the village's tense social and political climate. Lastly, Mgr. Simon Héroux, vicar general of the Diocese of Nicolet, agreed to speak with me, as did one opponent of the church conservation and former municipal councillor, Reynald Girard, who penned the petition for the referendum on the church's future. All the interviews took place between September 14th and 18th.

The themes which emerged from my discussions notably centred on a), the village's history and development; b), the nature of the parish and diocese's religious change; c), the pitched political battles spawned by the church question; d), the sociological consequences of the church's demolition; and e), the social significance of the bitterly fought saga with respect to how it reflects ongoing cultural change, to which even the smallest conglomerations are not immune.

B. History and Development: a territorial sociology

1. *Unification and Consolidation*

What now constitutes the centre of Saint-Edmond-de-Grantham was once the borderlands of four parishes. This meant that the 400 souls farming next to one another, who helped each other during harvests, and whose children attended school together, would disperse Sunday mornings to worship in the four disparate corners of Grantham County¹¹⁴⁹. This was the situation from the time when the original families cleared and first ploughed the soil in the 1840s until 1917, when a certain Joseph Gélinas donated land to create a new central parish, which would reduce the hinterland residents' commute for their Sunday obligation and permit them to govern themselves according to their rural conventions. However, the new layer of government did not justify the

¹¹⁴⁹ See interview with Jean-Claude Paradis by Ryan Lux, September 15, 2020, 1:11:12 mins., original: « *Parce que Saint-Edmond a été construite, fondée en 1917, avec des parties de toutes les paroisses voisines. Parce qu'à Saint-Edmond, il y avait des familles qui fréquentaient toutes ces églises* ».

convenience in everyone's eyes¹¹⁵⁰. "If you look at the archives, the books that have been written, there have always been some for and some against"¹¹⁵¹. Some early residents were especially critical of the location of the church, not being on the main road, highway 122, but instead of to the side, past the glen, in the dale, hidden from view from most traffic¹¹⁵². But, with time, the unification was a success, so much so that it cultivated an insular dynamic, which even long-time residents commented upon. Even though Paradis, Lajoie and Letendre are now pillars of the Old Stock community, none claim to be true Edmondois as they were born outside of the Parish. So, the unification, though controversial at first, turned out to be so successful that the descendants of the founding members retained moral and political authority over the local identity. Lajoie's explanation of the distinction made me think of the United Empire Loyalist identity, which once marked in and out groups in 19th and 20th century Upper Canada.

There is a clear separation between Old Stock people who were born here or whose parents were born here, who were established here from the beginning. I arrived here in 1969. We built our house in 1969. Well, I cannot consider myself Old Stock, but I belong all the same. Afterall, I hail from the region. I'm from Drummondville¹¹⁵³.

Pointedly, this is not exactly a characteristic conducive to cultivating a welcoming climate for Newcomers. According to the former municipal councillor, mayoral candidate, longtime teacher, and award-winning environmentalist Aliette Lajoie, that potent exclusionary local identity survived despite threats to its inter-generational transmission. Lajoie traced the first chips in the

¹¹⁵⁰ See interview with Aliette Lajoie by Ryan Lux, September 15, 2020, 10:50 mins., original: « *Apparemment, il y en avait toujours eu des chicanes depuis la fondation* ».

¹¹⁵¹ See interview with Ginette Letendre by Ryan Lux, September 18, 2020, 29:17 mins., original: « *Si on regarde dans les archives, les livres qui ont été écrits, mais il y a toujours eu des pour et des contres, là, tu sais* ».

¹¹⁵² *Idem.*, 29:50, original: « *Puis là, au départ, moi, je n'étais pas là. Mais ce que j'ai lu, ce qu'ils voulaient faire, c'est mettre le centre du village sur la 122* ».

¹¹⁵³ See interview with Aliette Lajoie by Ryan Lux, September 15, 2020, 11:00 mins., original: « *Il y a une séparation nette entre les personnes de souche ancienne qui sont nées ici ou dont les parents sont nés ici, qui sont établies ici depuis le début. Je suis arrivé ici en 1969. Nous avons construit notre maison en 1969. Je ne peux pas me considérer comme une vieille souche, mais j'en fais tout de même partie. Après tout, je suis originaire de la région. Je suis de Drummondville* ».

galvanised status enjoyed by Saint-Edmond's original families and the decline of the village's hard-fought-for autonomy from its more urban neighbours to 1965 when it faced a similar existential crisis as the question of the church. At that time, Saint-Edmond-de-Grantham had two schoolhouses, one on either end of the parish. By 1968, the technocratic centralisation movement won its fight to bus rural students into "urban" centres such as Saint-Germain-de-Grantham¹¹⁵⁴. In much the same way as some farmers balked at the cost of erecting an independent parish in 1917, the majority rejected the idea of building a modern school in 1965 for a variety of reasons, most notably among them was the aversion to sacrificing land and the fear of taxes¹¹⁵⁵.

After two years, there were no more schoolhouses, and since then the children attended school in Saint-Germain. So, when there is no school in a village, what happens? Citizens do not meet each other; the children do not know each other. School is like church – a meeting place. It's where we find the library and the gymnasium. At least it is somewhere to go if we do not have anywhere else. Now we have nowhere to go to play sports. Yes, we have the rink, but this mentality is playing out today¹¹⁵⁶.

Thus, from Aliette Lajoie's perspective, when first go to the schools, the rest will follow. Lajoie observed all this as a quasi-outsider. She was born in Drummondville and was 70 years old when I interviewed her in 2020. Lajoie studied at Laval University, the University of Sherbrooke, and the Strasbourg University of Psychology. With her husband, she built a second home in Saint-

¹¹⁵⁴ See interview with Ginette Letendre by Ryan Lux, September 18, 2020, 3:33 mins., original: « *Nous avons essayé, nous avons fait ce que nous pouvions et puis il y a eu, à l'époque, un refus de l'école centrale, ce que nous appelions. Puis, à la fin des années 60, il y a eu la régionalisation. Mais à ce moment-là, tous les enfants de Saint-Edmond ont déménagé à Saint-Germain* ».

¹¹⁵⁵ *Idem.*, 2:45, original: « *Il y a eu des tentatives de centralisation, puis de construction d'une école dans le village, mais, de toute façon, certaines personnes ont fait obstacle et n'ont pas voulu vendre le terrain. Et il y avait des dettes* ».

¹¹⁵⁶ See interview with Aliette Lajoie by Ryan Lux, September 15, 2020, 34:11 mins., original: « *Nous avons connu une situation similaire. En 1965, nous, les citoyens, avons refusé d'avoir une école dans le village. Regardez les petites écoles dans les rangées. Oui, mais deux ans plus tard, il n'y avait plus d'école et depuis, les enfants viennent à l'école ici. Quand il n'y a pas d'école dans un village, que se passe-t-il ? Les citoyens ne se rencontrent pas, les enfants ne se connaissent pas. Comme l'église, l'école est aussi un lieu de rencontre. Souvent, c'est là que se trouve la bibliothèque, le gymnase. On peut donc au moins y aller si on n'a pas d'autre endroit. Oui, en ce moment, nous n'avons pas d'endroit pour faire du sport, il y a la patinoire en hiver. Il n'y en a pas beaucoup. C'est tout cela qui fait que cette mentalité est un causeur d'aujourd'hui* ».

Edmond during the 1960s, which they would eventually move into full-time following her retirement from teaching on the West Island of Montreal in 2001. Lajoie immediately became active in the community, integrating herself with the Old Stock, and would lead its environmental efforts beginning in 2006.

Similarly, Ginette Letendre once considered herself a Newcomer. Her father was a school commissioner for the district, and he moved them to town in 1952 when she was five years old. She also linked the church closure to the school rationalisation of 1968. In fact, she lived next to one of the original schoolhouses where her mother was residing in 2020 when I met her for tea at her house. At 73, when I spoke with her, Letendre was retired from her job as a nurse, nursing teacher, and early childhood educator in Drummondville¹¹⁵⁷. Since her retirement, she has devoted much of her time to parish activities, including catechism classes and liturgy preparation. Letendre remembered that Saint-Edmond residents did not immediately feel the consequences of the decision to close its schools, but now both Lajoie and Letendre agree that it is impossible to ignore how it forever changed the course of the village's history.

Yes, I went to the school. Well, it was many years ago. We did all the preparations for the sacraments and the activities for the children, for Christmas, the choirs, and all that was done there. But once it was all moved to Saint-Germain, you know that creates a distance between the youth. Then automatically, between the parents too¹¹⁵⁸.

¹¹⁵⁷ See interview with Ginette Letendre by Ryan Lux, September 18, 2020, 54:02 mins., original: « *Oui, quand j'étais plus âgée, j'ai suivi un cours d'infirmière. J'ai enseigné aux infirmières. J'ai donné des cours de secourisme au CÉGEP. J'ai aussi enseigné à des gens qui voulaient travailler en garderie. J'ai étudié en soins infirmiers à Drummondville, puis à Sainte-Croix, et ensuite, j'ai enseigné aux infirmières auxiliaires pour la commission scolaire* ».

¹¹⁵⁸ *Idem.*, 4:45 mins., original: « *Oui, j'allais à l'école du rang, mais c'était il y a bien longtemps. Non, nous avions nos propres activités en tant qu'étudiants. Nous faisons toutes les préparations pour les sacrements et les activités pour les enfants, pour Noël, les chorales, tout ça, ça se faisait là-bas. Mais ici, comme c'était à Saint-Germain, vous savez, ça met de la distance. Oui, et automatiquement, les parents aussi* ».

“Everyone was drifting apart, which meant that, in the end, you know, as the years went by, the churchgoers, well, their heads were greying more and more”¹¹⁵⁹. Consequently, the *esprit du clocher*¹¹⁶⁰ gradually evolved as younger Saint-Edmondois failed to integrate into the still-tight-knit village social life, which shifted more and more to fulfil the needs of its active but ageing population.

Letendre pointed to the changing activities offered in the village as an example. She explained that in the 1980s and 1990s, Saint-Edmond had an active sporting life, one that gradually disappeared as engaged residents aged. The most fitting example was the Optimist Club, a service organisation like the Lion’s Club in English Canada, which ceased its activities in the 1990s. Locals essentially terminated their federation with the Optimist International and re-affiliated with the Golden Age Club – a senior’s social organisation¹¹⁶¹. Up until 2017, this club organised monthly community suppers and dances, which they once held at the municipal hall and later hosted at the retrofitted church since 2012¹¹⁶². Concerning younger Saint-Edmondois, Letendre admitted that “[a]s we got older, the younger people were left out. It’s as if they’ve been left on the sidelines”¹¹⁶³. Between an exclusive sense of belonging and its difficult transmission, local identity would become increasingly precious for some residents and more elusive to a growing number of residents.

¹¹⁵⁹ *Idem.*, 5:23 mins., original: « *Tout le monde s'éloigne, alors, à la fin, vous savez, au fil des ans, tous les gens qui sont restés à Saint-Edmond, les pratiquants, eh bien, leurs têtes grisonnaient de plus en plus, vous savez* ».

¹¹⁶⁰ Parish spirit.

¹¹⁶¹ *Idem.*, 20:54 mins., original: « *Et pourquoi ? Ai-je une explication ? C'est difficile. Je pense que c'est le déclin de l'engagement communautaire, qui est une tendance assez répandue. Oui, mais... peut-être qu'à un moment donné, il y a eu un manque de personnes et de leadership, ou de mouvements. Parce que dans les années 80, il y avait des activités sportives, dans les années 80 et 90. Et il y a eu le Club Optimiste, par la suite. Oui, mais le Club Optimiste a cessé ses activités au début des années 90. En 94, nous avons créé un autre club qui s'appelait le Club du Bel Âge, qui accueillait des membres à partir de 45 ans* ».

¹¹⁶² *Idem.*, 9:51 mins., original: « *Il y a eu une période, je vais vous dire jusqu'en 2017 à la veille des élections, où nous avions des repas communautaires, des dîners, des soirées récréatives* ».

¹¹⁶³ *Idem.*, 22:03 mins., original: « *Mais plus nous vieillissions, plus les jeunes étaient mis à l'écart. Ils étaient en quelque sorte laissés pour compte* ».

2. *Suburban Development and Hardening of Clan Mentalities: 1980s*

Meanwhile, beginning in the 1980s, as Saint-Edmond-de-Grantham's community life skewed older and older, the village saw a flurry of residential development activity, the likes it had never known before. Two suburban-style development projects brought in hundreds of new residents, a change which radically reoriented the community dynamic. Not only did the new developments – *le Patelin* and *le Nordique* – swell the long-time stable population of 506 people in 1976 to 762 residents in 2016 – the year of the public consultation and municipal by-election on the future of the church – but it also drew a different kind of resident to the agricultural community. New residents often hailed from urban centres like Montreal, Trois-Rivières, Sherbrooke, or Drummondville.

These New Arrivals moved to Saint-Edmond-de-Grantham for its natural setting, large building lots, and low taxes. I spoke with Reynald Girard who moved to Saint-Edmond around 2005 in his fifth year of retirement after leading a career as an economist in Montreal. “Because down here there are brooks. I have 120,000 square feet of land, bordered by a river. I'm here for the bucolic atmosphere”¹¹⁶⁴. Because their goal was to retreat from society into nature, the New Arrivals like Girard did not prioritise integration into the existing insular society remaining instead on their sprawling acreages and socialising with their friends from where they came from

Paradis explained his experience of the wave of Newcomers challenged his long-held conception of a tight-knit village. Paradis, 71 in 2020, who was two when his father, from Drummondville, bought his 40-acre poultry farm on highway 122 in 1951, was proud of his deep roots in the region.

¹¹⁶⁴ See interview with Reynald Girard by Ryan Lux, September 17, 2020, 1:20 mins., original: « *Je suis à la retraite depuis 20 ans, mais disons que nous sommes ici depuis 15 ans. Parce qu'il y a des cours d'eau ici. J'ai 120 000 mètres carrés de terrain et puis bordés par une rivière. Je suis ici pour l'atmosphère bucolique* ».

He took over the farm in 1969 and since expanded it to 1,000 hectares and 140,000 chickens¹¹⁶⁵. Though he did not practise his religion regularly, he considered himself a believer. He told me there was no feeling of belonging among the new suburban residents¹¹⁶⁶. “It’s not a village, Saint-Edmond, it’s not a parish. It’s two unstructured blocks: one block over there and another over there. It’s just two parcels of houses”¹¹⁶⁷. Opinion was divided between existing residents on the developments’ value for the village, reflecting the division, which several actors described as a foundational clan mentality¹¹⁶⁸. At the time of the suburban developments, Letendre explained that these two clans lined up behind either the McClures, farmers, who preferred retaining Saint-Edmond’s agricultural character and the Lafleur’s, builders, who whole-heartedly supported development¹¹⁶⁹. Tensions did not immediately flare over the developments but, subject to the shifting demographic weight between Old Stock and Newcomers, they rose to the surface as their interests clashed. It is important here to emphasise that not all Old Stock lined up behind the McClures and not all Newcomers supported the Lafleur’s development agenda, but this was the general pattern. What is important is that the demographic shift of the 1980s until the present destabilised what had previously been firm ‘in’ and ‘out’ groups.

According to Letendre, Lajoie, Paradis, and Abbé Dubois, the shifting sands of Saint-Edmond’s long-time stability even pitted family members against one another. For example, positions on development and the conservation of the church fractured the Corriveau and Lafleur families.

¹¹⁶⁵ See Thierry Larivière, « De 40 arpents à 1 000 ha. et 140 000 poules » *La Terre de chez nous*, 88(27), July 5, 2017, p. A3.

¹¹⁶⁶ See interview with Jean-Claude Paradis by Ryan Lux, September 15, 2020, 57:37 mins., original: « *Dans le passé, nous avons 500 personnes qui avaient des ancêtres ici. Aujourd’hui, il y a des constructions partout, des constructions pour les nouveaux arrivants. Il n’y a donc plus de sentiment d’appartenance* ».

¹¹⁶⁷ *Idem.*, 43:06 mins., original: « *Ce n’est pas un village de Saint-Edmond, ce n’est pas une paroisse. C’est deux blocs déstructurés, l’un par-là, l’autre par-là, ces deux paquets de maisons* ».

¹¹⁶⁸ See interview with Abbé Gilles Dubois by Ryan Lux, September 14, 2020, 0:09 mins., original: « *Mais à Saint-Edmond, les deux groupes ont toujours été divisés* ».

¹¹⁶⁹ See interview with Aliette Lajoie by Ryan Lux, September 15, 2020, 34:01 mins., original: « *Oui, il y a des clans, McClure, Lafleur* ».

Abbé Gilles Dubois noted that one of Mayor Robert Corriveau's sisters used to frequent the church often and was a significant opponent of the transformation project. The priest explained that family members were no longer on speaking terms when I interviewed him in 2020 and said that this sacrifice of family relations reflects how single-minded the politician and his clan were with respect to destroying the church. "So internally, he's so entrenched in these things that you can't get anyone to change, especially him. It's because of him we failed"¹¹⁷⁰.

Even though Abbé Dubois, 73 in 2020, resided in Saint-Germain, he gave Mass regularly at Saint-Edmond and presided over the entire church closure saga, having been named pastor of the still independent parishes in 2004, so he had a long and somewhat impartial view of the affair. Hailing from Drummondville, Dubois studied mechanics, worked on the hydroelectric installations on James Bay, and became a maritime engineer before heading to the Seminary of Montreal from which he graduated in 1982¹¹⁷¹.

Returning to the internecine village conflict, the Corriveau sister even openly chastised her brother at a council meeting over the planned demolition of the church and following the meeting, one of the Lafleurs approached the sister in a bid to intimidate her from interfering again¹¹⁷². Paradis

¹¹⁷⁰ See interview with Abbé Gilles Dubois by Ryan Lux, September 14, 2020, 31:53 mins., original: « *La famille Corriveau est ici depuis longtemps. Au sein de la famille Corriveau, il y a eu beaucoup de querelles, parce que certains comprenaient que ça n'avait pas l'air correct. Mais une de ses sœurs, ses frères, ils ne se voient plus. Une des infirmières venait souvent à l'église, mais elle n'a pas compris que le premier partenariat venu satisfaisait tout le monde. Pourquoi le détruire ? Tout le monde est d'accord. Mais quand on dit non, il faut poser le problème. Mais quand on a des idées préconçues sur les choses, c'est difficile de s'en débarrasser. Surtout, c'était tellement ancré en lui que lorsque le maire Auger a démissionné. Il s'est dit : « Je vois bien que c'est comme ça que ça va se passer ! ». En son for intérieur, il est tellement ancré dans ces choses qu'il est impossible de faire changer qui que ce soit, et surtout pas lui. C'est à cause de lui que nous avons échoué ».*

¹¹⁷¹ *Idem.*, 56:27 mins., original: « *J'ai commencé, c'est un peu compliqué, mais je suis allé à l'Institut de technologie de Drummondville comme technicien en mécanique. Là, j'ai travaillé comme mécanicien pour la machinerie lourde, les grands projets de barrage, la baie James ont fait le grand barrage. J'ai ensuite abandonné ce métier. Je suis allé à l'Institut maritime de Rimouski, où j'ai suivi mon cours de génie maritime. Cela m'a pris quatre ans. Ensuite, je suis allé au séminaire et j'ai fait mon baccalauréat en théologie au Séminaire de Montréal. J'ai terminé en '82 ».*

¹¹⁷² See interview with Jean-Claude Paradis by Ryan Lux, September 15, 2020, 23:03 mins., original: « *Et puis la madame, l'entrepreneure, lors d'une fête du conseil à la fin de la séance du conseil. Une des sœurs du maire, Ginette*

explained that this type of behaviour was unsurprising to locals who were used to this kind of intimidation by the Lafleurs. He recalled once replacing his roof with a kind of steel shingle the Lafleur's construction business did not supply and when they found out, Paradis described the reaction as one of intense rage¹¹⁷³. "When you get your hands on anything they react because, as far as they're concerned, Saint-Edmond belongs to them. Yes, it's true. They want to control everything"¹¹⁷⁴

But the population explosion also reoriented Saint-Edmond's Old Stock traditionalist clan, rendering them more open to outsiders, less exclusive. The chief example of this is that many of the leaders of the movement were not technically Old Stock. Lajoie moved to the village as a retiree, and she sat on council and ran as the pro-church mayor. Paradis moved with his family at a young age. Letendre, who was more of a leader within the church as opposed to in the political domain, explained that she felt like an outsider up until the suburban development of the 1980s, even though she moved to Saint-Edmond in 1952. Like many Newcomers, Letendre worked in Drummondville, where she was a nurse and nursing instructor. Despite their move to Saint-Edmond, Letendre's family continued to attend Mass at Drummondville's Saint-Pierre and Paul church, not just because the schedule suited them. "It's funny to say, but my mother always said that in Saint-Edmond, we're not from here. Well, she always felt that she didn't quite fit in"¹¹⁷⁵. So, it surprised Letendre when the local Parish invited her parents and family to celebrate their

Corriveau, a posé des questions. Ensuite, il a été gêné. Puis, après la séance du conseil, la femme de l'entrepreneur est allée voir sa sœur ».

¹¹⁷³ *Idem.*, 11:19 mins., original: « Il s'est emporté contre moi parce que je n'avais pas engagé l'entrepreneur en question - j'avais engagé quelqu'un d'autre. Il était frustré, frustré, en colère, en colère, il était livide ».

¹¹⁷⁴ *Idem.*, 10:48 mins., original: « Quand on met la main sur quelque chose, ils réagissent parce que, pour eux, Saint-Edmond leur appartient. Oui, c'est vrai. Ils voulaient tout contrôler ».

¹¹⁷⁵ See interview with Ginette Letendre by Ryan Lux, September 18, 2020, 1:00:00 mins., original: « C'est drôle à dire, mais ma mère disait toujours qu'à Saint-Edmond, vu que nous ne sommes arrivés ici qu'en 52, nous ne sommes pas de souche. Non, on ne l'est pas. Et puis, bon, elle a toujours senti qu'il y avait toujours un peu, qu'elle n'était pas tout à fait acceptée dans ce groupe-là. ».

50th wedding anniversary at Saint-Edmond's church. Since that moment, Letendre became more and more involved in the parish and felt like she truly belonged, so much so that her rubric for who was a real Saint-Edmondois shifted from birth right to one rooted in community participation and involvement¹¹⁷⁶. Unlike before, when social mixing threatened a "pure" local identity, now the opposite was true; Old Stock residents avoided their transplanted neighbours at their peril. When the 1980s wave of Newcomers arrived, they largely stayed on their acreages and the two compounds which contained them. Letendre blamed this segregation for allowing the demolition to take place at all.

We certainly lost our identity. What's more, you know, it's not whether they're from the area or not that's important, it's the involvement that these people didn't have. They didn't understand the reality that the rest of us were living¹¹⁷⁷.

So, while cleavages pre-existed the arrival of urban retirees and young families in the 1980s and 1990s, based on family networks' idea of one community, it was not until the suburban development of *le Nordique* and *le Patelin* when two incompatible worldviews would emerge to thoroughly divide the community, worldviews that would eventually converge on the future of the village church.

3. *Two Tales of One Village: Oppositional Worldviews*

Even though independent worldviews have existed since the arrival of the Newcomers, the full-blown clash between them took decades of gestation. Active parishioner Ginette Letendre

¹¹⁷⁶ *Idem.*, 1:01:16 mins., original: « C'est un événement qui a vraiment fait bouger les choses. Ensuite, lorsque j'ai commencé à m'impliquer davantage, nous avons continué à aller à la messe là-bas ».

¹¹⁷⁷ *Idem.*, 1:02:45 mins., original: « Nous avons certainement perdu notre identité. Et vous savez, nous avons toujours pensé que les personnes qui ont procédé à la démolition étaient des personnes que nous n'avions jamais vues impliquées dans la paroisse. De plus, vous savez, ce n'est pas le fait qu'ils soient de la région ou non qui est importante, mais c'est l'implication que ces personnes n'ont pas eue. Ils ne connaissaient pas la réalité dans laquelle nous vivions ».

remembered a time not too long before the church conflict when Old Stock and new residents would intermingle. “I wouldn't say we were great friends, but you know, we had acquaintances, we had meetings, shared interests, we talked to each other, we experienced things together. But now there's nothing left¹¹⁷⁸. Farmer, Jean-Claude Paradis recalled that in the beginning, even Mayor Corriveau supported converting the church into a community centre¹¹⁷⁹.

But the tenuous consensus was already showing signs of breakdown during the 2013 municipal election when failed mayoral candidate Claire Grenier St-Sauveur advocated for municipal investment in fibre-optic internet as an alternative to proposed investments in the church. Paradis, who ran for council unopposed in the same election explained that this type of advocacy was on behalf of the New Arrivals, who were not only used to having high-speed internet, but also depended on it for remote work and retaining their urban contacts. Moreover, access to high-speed internet was viewed by the pro-development group as a way to attract buyers for a planned new development, which shall be discussed shortly. Paradis argued that by positioning the internet versus the church, Grenier-St-Sauveur and the development lobby successfully polarised the village along Old Stock and Newcomer allegiances. A company eventually installed the cable in late 2016, but by that time it was too late; the question had already become zero-sum. Ironically, Paradis argued that the high-speed internet could have saved the church if the antenna had been installed on the church steeple first¹¹⁸⁰.

¹¹⁷⁸ *Idem.*, 22:51 mins., original: « Comme nous l'avons dit, ce n'étaient pas de grands amis, mais vous savez, nous avions des connaissances, nous avions des rencontres, même des choses, nous nous parlions, puis nous vivions des choses ensemble. Mais maintenant, il n'y a plus rien ».

¹¹⁷⁹ See interview with Jean-Claude Paradis by Ryan Lux, September 15, 2020, 8:56 mins., original: « Mais là, à l'époque, il était d'accord. Un jour plus tard, il est parti, mais au début, oui. Au début, il était d'accord, il voulait qu'il fasse des travaux. Mais quand la subvention est allée à l'entrepreneur, clic ».

¹¹⁸⁰ *Idem.*, 53 :34 mins., original: « Elle voulait avoir la fibre optique et ne pouvait donc rien mettre dans l'église. En fin de compte, la fibre optique est passée par la cloche. Mais il a fallu un certain temps pour la mettre en place. Mais lorsque le dossier de la fibre optique a été réglé, nous avons eu plus de temps pour rénover l'église. D'accord,

Whether or not he was correct is far from settled. The only anti-church partisan who agreed to speak to me painted a bleak picture of Saint-Edmond-de-Grantham's *esprit de corps*. According to Montreal retiree Reynald Girard, the concept of a village hub was doomed from the outset.

Most of the houses are on Highway 122, which is a provincial highway. And even when there was a convenience store, it was easier for people to go elsewhere than to go to buy anything. Anyway, if they needed something, they went to Drummondville. The church was only the cherry on the sundae¹¹⁸¹.

Moreover, Girard expressed scepticism over the legitimacy of the village's agricultural identity. He told me that there were two or three big farms which had swallowed up the popular image of the small-scale independent farmer¹¹⁸². He suggested that it was time for Saint-Edmond to accept what it was: a bedroom community. Part of that acceptance, he argued, should be a commitment to its competitive advantage of nearly non-existent infrastructure compared to neighbouring municipalities like Saint-Germain or Saint-Eugène, keeping taxes to a bare minimum.

Vicar General, or cleric second only to the bishop, Mgr. Simon Héroux, 75 in 2020, who had to eventually authorise the church sale to the municipality against the wishes of newly elected Mayor Corriveau in 2016, offered a more disinterested perspective of the village's dispute over the church's destiny. He told me that in his 49 years working for the diocese of Nicolet, he had overseen 25 church closures, and, of these, Saint-Edmond-de-Grantham's was the saddest case he

nous étions bloqués, parce que nous n'avions pas pu entamer le processus. Si nous avions pu le connecter à la fibre optique, il aurait été impossible de le détruire ».

¹¹⁸¹ See interview with Reynald Girard by Ryan Lux, September 17, 2020, mins., original: « *La plupart des maisons se trouvent sur la route 122, qui est une route provinciale. Et même quand il y avait un dépanneur, c'était plus facile pour eux d'aller ailleurs que d'aller au magasin pour acheter quelque chose. De toute façon, s'ils avaient besoin de quelque chose, ils allaient à Drummondville. L'église n'était que la cerise sur le sundae* ».

¹¹⁸² *Idem.*, 27:35 mins., original: « *Il y a très peu d'agriculteurs. Il y a quelques grands, mais il n'y a plus beaucoup de petits* ».

had witnessed¹¹⁸³. Mgr. Héroux studied at the now-shuttered Nicolet Seminary between 1958 and 1965. During this period there were 40 priests working at the seminary who dedicated themselves to educating the rural population, receiving only \$1 a day for their labour. “It was a mission of educating priests. It was about vocations and money was not the first priority”¹¹⁸⁴. With that in mind, Héroux expressed an understanding for both sides of the conflict. On the one hand, as an administrator, he was sympathetic to the need to consider budgets. But on the other hand, reflecting on his own home parish of Sainte-Élisabeth-de-Warwick, he knew firsthand how difficult it could be to assign monetary value to ancestral churches.

I started serving Mass in that church when I was seven. My mother was born there, and I was born in the same room where she was born. The emotional attachment you have to parish cemeteries, my parents are there, my grandparents are there, my friends are there. So, I have to go back to Sainte-Elisabeth. I've got lots of friends there, so I've always dreamed of going back to the parish, but that's the way it is when you come from a rural background¹¹⁸⁵.

So, when the Parish expressed interest in selling, Old Stock residents looked at acquiring the church as an opportunity to secure an identity and social pole for the village, having recently sold the former municipal building in 2011. Meanwhile, New Arrivals' priorities were of the fiscal order. Mgr. Héroux told me he saw the conflict brewing from the start.

They wanted a community hall. But it's clear that risked creating a dispute with the people who worked in Drummondville who had moved to Saint-Edmond and

¹¹⁸³ See interview with Mgr Simon Héroux by Ryan Lux, September 17, 2020, 2:27 mins., original: « *Je pense que c'est l'un des dossiers les plus tristes que j'ai eu à traiter au cours de ma 49e année à l'évêché, et j'ai supervisé 25 fermetures d'églises* ».

¹¹⁸⁴ *Idem.*, 34:44 mins., original: « *Si vous regardez l'histoire de l'Église, nous avons des communautés religieuses. Lorsque j'étais au séminaire de Nicolet, entre 1958 et 1965, la majorité était composée de prêtres. Il y avait quarante prêtres, mais, vous savez, un prêtre était logé, nourri, mais il gagnait un dollar par jour. Et c'est tout. Si nous avons pu éduquer beaucoup de gens dans les campagnes, c'est grâce aux prêtres et aux religieuses du monde de l'enseignement, qui ne travaillaient pour presque rien. C'était la mission des prêtres d'éduquer. C'était des vocations et l'argent n'était pas la priorité* ».

¹¹⁸⁵ *Idem.*, 38:49 mins., original: « *J'ai commencé à servir la messe dans cette église à l'âge de sept ans. Ma mère y est née et je suis né dans la même chambre qu'elle. L'attachement émotionnel aux cimetières paroissiaux. Mes parents y sont, mes grands-parents y sont, mes amis y sont. Je dois donc retourner à Sainte-Elisabeth. J'ai beaucoup d'amis, alors j'ai toujours rêvé de retourner à la paroisse, mais c'est comme ça quand on vient d'un milieu rural* ».

because we pay a lot less tax in the country. They were afraid that the church would raise their taxes¹¹⁸⁶.

Ginette Letendre shared the same opinion. She suggested that the village should go ahead and change their unofficial maxim from “Saint-Edmond, a harbour of peace” to better reflect the interests of their new neighbours “come here for a new chalet. Taxes not too high”¹¹⁸⁷.

Another decisive point of clan divergence in the small village was the project to develop the lands northwest of the village centre, on the other side of Lanoie Road, where there were plans to build 46 new homes, now that the two developments from the 1980s and 1990s were basically full. According to members of the 2013-2017 municipal council, their decision not to subsidise paving the road in the new development was what broke the consensus on the church renovation. Paradis said, “But yeah, [Manon Rodier] was for the church, but that ended when she didn't get any money from the council for her streets”¹¹⁸⁸. Paradis voted against the demands that had been granted by previous councils for *le Nordique* and *le Patelin*, rendering the development considerably more expensive. The 2013 council, dominated by Old Stock were not persuaded by development rhetoric, being more concerned with conservation.

So, she was angry with me because I'm the one who said no. Without the money she didn't want to do anything for the church. That's the way she arranged things.

¹¹⁸⁶ *Idem.*, 37:34 mins., original: « Ils voulaient une salle communautaire. Mais il est clair qu'un des risques d'un conflit, ce sont les gens qui travaillent à Drummondville. Et ils ont déménagé à Saint-Edmond. Et encore une fois, parce que nous payons beaucoup moins de taxes à la campagne. Ils avaient peur que l'église augmente leurs impôts ».

¹¹⁸⁷ See interview with Ginette Letendre by Ryan Lux, September 18, 2020, 24:21 mins., original: « La devise de la municipalité est 'tout le monde aura un havre de paix', mais elle devrait être 'tout le monde vient ici pour avoir un nouveau chalet. Des impôts peu élevés' ».

¹¹⁸⁸ See interview with Jean-Claude Paradis by Ryan Lux, September 15, 2020, 26:15 mins., original: « Mais oui, elle était pour l'église, mais cela a tourné au vinaigre parce qu'elle n'a pas reçu d'argent du conseil municipal pour ses rues ».

The municipality no longer pays for the streets. It's the contractor who pays for the streets¹¹⁸⁹.

After that refusal, the anti-church lobby appeared, seemingly out of nowhere, with promises of a new community centre instead of the one which the Old Stock had been working on seriously for at least four years. According to all my interlocutors, including anti-church partisan Reynald Girard, for the first time the future of the church was plausibly called into question and divided the small population with respect to its fate. Paradis explained,

[b]ecause the other council before us used to pay, but it wasn't done any more. The one who was refused payment for their street turns up and says, "You want your church, don't you? I'll see about that..."¹¹⁹⁰.

In response, Paradis alleged that the pro-development lobby targeted the village church, a project close to the hearts of many Old Stock residents blamed for thwarting the development project. Thus, the transposition of the development conflict onto the church itself elicited an ever more hardened fissure between the two groups, one that eventually led to physical violence and threats at a municipal council meeting. Different imaginaries of the church and religion were called on by each side. The traditionalists saw it as a link with family, the past, and cultural identity, whereas some on the pro-development side saw it as at best a financial albatross and, at worst, a symbol of oppression. Vicar General Mgr Simon Héroux explained a clear pattern throughout Saint-Edmond's church saga. He even wondered if the question of the church's future would have even held such traction if it were not for the massive wave of New Arrivals who moved to the village

¹¹⁸⁹ *Idem.*, 26:22 mins., original: « Elle était donc en colère contre moi parce que c'est moi qui avais dit non. Sans l'argent, elle ne voulait pas du tout l'apporter à l'église. C'est comme ça que ça se passe. La municipalité ne paie plus pour les rues. C'est l'entrepreneur qui paie pour les rues ».

¹¹⁹⁰ *Idem.*, 5:01 mins., original: « Il y a un entrepreneur qui a fait subventionner ces élus parce qu'il se développe ici. C'est tout. Il voulait que la paroisse paie pour cela. Parce que l'autre conseil avant lui a payé, mais ça ne se fait plus. Ils veulent plus. Lui, celui qui s'est vu refuser le paiement de sa rue arrive et dit, vous voulez votre église, n'est-ce pas ? Je me débarrasse de votre église ».

during the period of sharp decline in religious practice across the 1980s and 1990s: “There are the old families, and these families are much more attached to the church than the New Arrivals who had no roots there. They got married and had their children baptised there”¹¹⁹¹. Paradis made the same observation but with a bit more nuance.

The people who fought for the church are mostly local people who belong to Saint-Edmond. Everyone, all those of my age, even the younger ones, who lived here and still do, and others who welcomed the church and realised that, without the church of Saint-Edmond, there will be nothing left. There are even some who weren't from here. They used a bit of logic to say it doesn't make sense to destroy it. We contacted two architects and not one firm said you didn't have a good idea and that it was solid¹¹⁹².

Parish Council President Michel Côté, of Saint-Germain church, insisted that the demographic division vis-à-vis the church was largely determined by residents' age. From his vantage point, the minority of residents 60 and above supported conserving the church, while the more numerous middle-aged and younger residents preferred investing their tax dollars differently¹¹⁹³. Overwhelmingly, voters with young families prioritised investments such as improved internet

¹¹⁹¹ See interview with Mgr. Simon Héroux by Ryan Lux, September 17, 2020, 39:14 mins., original: « *Et les opposants à l'achat de l'église. Il y avait beaucoup de nouveaux arrivants. Si vous voulez, dans une paroisse comme celle-là, il y a les vieilles familles et ces familles sont attachées à l'église, bien plus que les nouveaux arrivants qui n'y ont pas de racines. Ils se mariaient et faisaient baptiser leurs enfants dans cette église* ».

¹¹⁹² See interview with Jean-Claude Paradis by Ryan Lux, September 15, 2020, 21:54 mins., original: « *Les gens qui se sont battus pour l'église sont pour la plupart des habitants de Saint-Edmond. Tous, même ceux de mon âge qui ont vécu ici et qui y vivent encore, et d'autres qui ont accueilli l'église et qui ont compris que, sans l'église de Saint-Edmond, il n'y aurait plus rien. Certains, même s'ils n'étaient pas d'ici, ont fait preuve d'un peu de logique pour dire qu'il n'était pas logique de la détruire. Et si on avait eu des rapports négatifs aux entrepreneurs ou aux architectes, si on avait eu des rapports négatifs, on ne l'aurait pas fait. Ici, nous avons eu des rapports parce que tout le monde était d'accord, tout le monde était pour. Les architectes. Et ce n'est pas tout. Ils ont contacté deux architectes et aucun cabinet n'a dit que vous n'aviez pas une bonne idée* ».

¹¹⁹³ See interview with Michel Côté by Ryan Lux, September 14, 2020, 43:34 mins., original: « *Les caractéristiques des personnes qui étaient en faveur du maintien de l'église ? Très peu. Il y a très peu de gens, tout d'abord, et ils sont tous âgés. Quand je dis personnes âgées, 60 ans et plus* ».

access and recreational amenities that would attract people like themselves to the growing village and encourage youth to remain. The decision was zero-sum: heritage or development¹¹⁹⁴.

Côté, 75 in 2020, worked for the University of Sherbrooke for more than a decade before his retirement as assistant director of the master's program in administration. A native of Montreal, he moved to Saint-Germain in 1995 and completed a master's at the University of Sherbrooke, where he worked thereafter¹¹⁹⁵. Côté was nominated parish council president in 2002 and had occupied the post ever since when I met him. Following the 2013 parish fusion, his purview extended to Saint-Edmond under the auspices of the new parish, Notre-Dame-de-Lourdes. Initially, Côté was approached to run as a churchwarden following a couple of resignations from the Saint-Germain parish council. So, when he went to his first meeting to see how things worked, he agreed to take on the position. A month-and-a-half later, the council asked him to chair the council as president. Côté explained that, at that point, he knew very little about the legal framework of how churches functioned and that he did not plan on becoming president, "but people trusted me even though they didn't know me. They didn't know that I had a bachelor's degree and a master's degree in administration"¹¹⁹⁶. He acknowledged that his 40 years experience in the field meant that he was very comfortable exercising his new role, an ease he would need to navigate the trouble already brewing when he inherited the jurisdiction.

¹¹⁹⁴ *Idem.*, 44:08 mins., original: « Tandis que les partisans de la démolition de l'église étaient le reste des personnes de moins de cet âge. Et dans le sens de la démolition et de l'église en arrière-plan, il y avait l'idée de créer des activités pour garder les jeunes à Saint-Edmond. On a donc échangé des activités de loisirs contre des activités religieuses, et on a construit une patinoire quatre saisons en démolissant l'église ».

¹¹⁹⁵ *Idem.*, 2:05 mins., original: « J'ai 75 ans. Je suis originaire de Montréal, mais cela fait longtemps. J'ai vécu à Montréal pendant une vingtaine d'années, puis en banlieue de Montréal pendant une quinzaine d'années, et je suis ici, dans les environs de Drummondville, depuis 25 ans. En fait, j'ai fait ma maîtrise à Sherbrooke, et j'ai fait mon baccalauréat à temps partiel, tout en poursuivant mes activités professionnelles. Et à l'époque, c'était en ressources humaines et en relations de travail ».

¹¹⁹⁶ *Idem.*, 47:58 mins., original: « Je n'avais pas ce désir lorsque j'ai assisté à ma première réunion en tant que marguillier, mais les gens m'ont fait confiance. Ils ne me connaissaient pas. Ils ne savaient pas que j'avais une licence et une maîtrise en administration ».

One of Côté's biggest and most complex dossiers was the delicate strategy to transfer Saint-Edmond Church to the municipality, which had started leasing the church in 2013. By then, some residents were already speaking out against the plan, such as avid writer of letters to the editor, Huguette Alie-Désilets, letters which at times required Côté to respond with his own op-eds. Though she refused to be interviewed, her positions on the sale of a religious building to the municipality are well known. Paradis recalled that Alie-Désilets, who lives in *Le Patelin* development, would write a letter to the newspaper on a near-weekly basis and would keep the story in Drummondville headlines by serving as a pipeline to a sympathetic anti-religion journalist¹¹⁹⁷.

So, at council meetings, where the two clans would confront one another in person as opposed to from the comfort of their writing desks, anything could happen. On one side were religious convictions, family connections, local identity and on the other were anti-religious sentiments, individualism, and fiscal anxiety. With social media and rumour mills running at full capacity in the village of 700-plus people, emotions ran high. Even though there are no publicly available police reports, multiple sources recounted the fight at the council meeting in 2017 when newly elected mayor Corriveau announced the church demolition (as well as the media reports detailed in the previous chapter). As mentioned, the mayor's sister publicly denounced her brother's decision, which inspired the wrath of the residential developer who pulled the strings of the anti-church movement from behind the scenes. Paradis explained that she started screaming at Ginette Corriveau that "it was none of her business", and that she should not cross her brother, "and then she came closer to her," Paradis continued, "Then a man who'd been there stepped in front of her,

¹¹⁹⁷ See interview with Jean-Claude Paradis by Ryan Lux, September 15, 2020, 27:20 mins., original: « *Elle a écrit une lettre chaque semaine, elle a parlé avec des journalistes. Mais je pense que le journaliste était un parti antireligieux et qu'il s'est rangé de leur côté. C'était le gang* ».

told her to move on and she slapped him across the face”¹¹⁹⁸. Later she called the police on the man in question, accusing *him* of assaulting *her*. Paradis explained the aftermath, “we told him to make a complaint. Well, it wasn't a hospital case, but he was bleeding. He's big and tough, so if he had hit her, it would have been obvious”¹¹⁹⁹.

But, before the village's existential conflict adhered itself to the church and spilled into every crevice of Saint-Edmond Society, nourishing an all-consuming polemic, the closure's origins sprang from a parallel religious source, distinct from the questions of clans, territory, and worldviews broached above.

C. Religious Transformation of a Catholic bastion

1. *Portrait of How a Country Parish Can Disappear*

During the modernising periods of the 1930s until the Quiet Revolution, the Quebec clergy was not worried about its rural parishes. For most people, the village church was inextricably linked to and a bastion of the prevailing social order. It was unthinkable that residents would ever divorce their secular and religious spheres or even that such a situation was possible. Even well into the 1970s and early 1980s, religious life in Saint-Edmond-de-Grantham carried on much as it had since the church was built in 1917. Nurse and long-time resident Ginette Letendre described the dynamic: “[w]hen you had the priest living in the rectory, it's less obvious now, but you know, in the ‘70s, he was almost the king and master”¹²⁰⁰. She explained the changes in clerical authority

¹¹⁹⁸ *Idem.*, 25:00 mins., original: « Elle s'est approchée d'elle et lui a crié : "Ce n'est pas à toi de poser cette question, c'est ton frère. C'est ton frère !" et elle s'est approchée d'elle. Un homme qui était là s'est alors avancé devant elle, lui a dit d'avancer, et elle l'a giflé ».

¹¹⁹⁹ *Idem.*, 25:51 mins., original: « Il est capable de porter plainte, nous lui avons dit de porter plainte, ce n'était pas un cas d'hôpital, mais il saignait. Il est capable et grand, donc s'il lui avait donné une fessée, cela aurait été évident ».

¹²⁰⁰ See interview with Ginette Letendre by Ryan Lux, September 18, 2020, 43:24 mins., original: « Oui, c'est ça. Oui, c'est ça. Et c'est certain. Quand le prêtre vivait dans le presbytère, c'est bien, c'est moins évident maintenant, mais vous savez, dans les années 70, il était presque le roi et le maître, vous savez ».

that swept across much of Québec during the 1960s took longer to reach Saint-Edmond-de-Grantham where it was maintained until a shortage of priests meant that the small parish would have to share with its neighbouring parishes, without, however, changing its autonomous legal status¹²⁰¹.

That happened in the 1980s and the changing clerical landscape ushered in a period of innovation for the parish, which had always considered itself somewhat of a renegade. Saint-Edmond Parish was accompanied in its “orphanhood” by Father Jean-Jacques Forest, their new pastor based in Saint-Germain-de-Grantham. Letendre credited him for training the laypeople to take care of their own affairs¹²⁰². Even though it was psychologically and administratively difficult at first to transition to a layperson-led parish, Letendre experienced the change as an awakening. “I found my voice in that. My goodness! I was happy. Yes, but I felt like I was doing something for the community. I was in action, not submission”¹²⁰³. But not everyone experienced the loss of a resident priest as a liberation. Letendre estimated that the new order of things, which included liturgical experimentation, divided the parish and accelerated the decline in religious practice¹²⁰⁴.

Yet, in the early and mid-1990s, when Letendre served as a churchwarden, weekly attendance still hovered between 100 and 150 people, which, for a village of only 540 people at the time,

¹²⁰¹ *Idem.*, 43 :53 mins., original: « Moi, vous savez, le prêtre, avec le maire, je parle des années 70, mais c'est sûr que c'est dans les années 60 avec la Révolution tranquille que les choses ont commencé à changer, mais peut-être plus lentement ici qu'à Montréal ».

¹²⁰² *Idem.*, 41 :52 mins., original: « Oh, mon Dieu, le dernier prêtre résident est là ! Cela fait longtemps. Dans les années 80. Vous vous souvenez de Desmarais ? Oui, il y a une petite différence, mais c'était à l'époque. Je me souviens de Jean-Jacques Foret, qui était prêtre à Saint-Germain et qui venait dire la messe le dimanche. Mais il était là. Il nous avait beaucoup formés, si vous voulez, pour s'occuper de nous autres ».

¹²⁰³ *Idem.*, 44:48 mins., original: « Personnellement, non. Je l'ai fait. J'ai trouvé ma voix là-dedans. Oh, mon Dieu ! Oh, mon Dieu ! J'étais... J'étais heureuse. Oui, mais j'avais l'impression de faire quelque chose pour la communauté. J'étais dans l'action, pas dans la soumission ».

¹²⁰⁴ *Idem.*, 45:22 mins., original: « Je vois pour le reste de la communauté. Eh bien, je suppose qu'il y a eu un clivage entre ceux qui se sont impliqués et ceux qui ont laissé couler. Pour moi, il s'agissait avant tout de m'impliquer, parce que j'ai trouvé une vocation, en quelque sorte ».

represented a figure of 28 per cent of residents¹²⁰⁵. So even while attendance remained relatively strong, the transition from the 1970s - when virtually every household paid their tithes - to much reduced circumstances hit the Parish hard. Maintaining a church large enough to fit the entire village meant that everyone had to contribute. Letendre recalled discussions surrounding financial difficulties first occurring in 1998¹²⁰⁶. Meanwhile, the average age of active parishioners was constantly climbing, while it became obvious that even if the building was still solid, there was considerable maintenance to be undertaken¹²⁰⁷.

Parish council president Michel Côté described the generational relationship between declining religious practice and the important indicator for future religious practice, sacramental participation, as a vicious circle. He explained that children often receive the sacraments of baptism, first communion, and confirmation owing to social pressure exerted by grandparents¹²⁰⁸. When grandparents and parents no longer attend Mass, the incentives to mark milestones in the Church disappear¹²⁰⁹. Likewise, as rituals of induction into a parish dry up, the religious justifications of indefinitely maintaining a church evaporate. From Mgr. Simon Héroux's vantage point, the parish dynamic was unmistakably heading in an indefinitely negative direction. He

¹²⁰⁵ *Idem.*, 1:17 mins., original: « Mais dans les années 90, mon Dieu ! C'est difficile de s'en souvenir aujourd'hui. Nous étions 100, 150 personnes ».

¹²⁰⁶ *Idem.*, 46:00 mins., original: « Si je me souviens bien, j'étais une marguillière dans les années 90, et je pense que c'est en 1998 que la fabrique a commencé à connaître des difficultés financières en raison d'une baisse de la fréquentation, etc. ».

¹²⁰⁷ *Idem.*, 5:23 mins., original: « Tout le monde s'éloignait, ce qui fait que, finalement, vous savez, au fur et à mesure que les années passaient, tous les gens qui restaient à Saint-Edmond, les praticiens, eh bien, leur tête grisonnait de plus en plus, vous savez. Bon, à l'époque, de toute façon, c'était plus, c'était plus difficile. Donc c'est le conseil de fabrique. L'église date de 1917. Comme tout bâtiment, elle a besoin d'être entretenue à un moment donné, mais c'était quand même mon idée. Je ne suis pas un expert en construction, mais c'était quand même solide. Je ne suis pas un expert en construction, mais c'était quand même solide. Mais il fallait encore refaire la toiture ou réparer le clocher ».

¹²⁰⁸ See interview with by Ryan Lux, Michel Côté, September 14, 2020, 1:00:16 mins., original: « La pression sociale est souvent exercée par les parents ou les grands-parents ».

¹²⁰⁹ *Idem.*, 59:53 mins., original: « Ainsi, si le prêtre de la paroisse organise une action paroissiale pour la première communion ou la confirmation, il y a beaucoup plus de chances d'obtenir des participants si les parents ou les grands-parents sont impliqués dans des activités religieuses que s'ils ne le sont pas ».

blamed contemporary society's demand for two incomes, busy schedules and the absence of a school for automatic catechism for Saint-Edmond's sharp decline during the 2000s and the unavoidable recognition that religious practice could no longer justify maintaining the primarily sacred nature of the village's most important building, both architecturally and socially¹²¹⁰. Côté agreed that fiscal decline became irreversible around 2005 when diminished religious participation started to be seriously reflected in the coffers. As opposed to having good and bad years, a steady downward trend became evident across all revenue streams: weekly offerings, tithes, and legacies from deceased parishioners. "There was an unmet need and an acknowledgement of underfunding"¹²¹¹.

The short-term response was to fuse Saint-Edmond with the more prosperous Saint-Germain and Saint-Eugène parishes in 2013, which relieved some of the financial stress while ensuring that religious practice and community use could continue. Always characterised by its independence of spirit, Letendre said the Parish experienced fusion with difficulty. That being said, Côté as the new administrator, helped keep the lights on for a few years to come. Côté – for whom deficit was anathema – acknowledged there was no question of maintaining the status quo. Throughout his tenure, Côté always sought to minimise costs by soliciting donations in cash or in kind for things like holy wine and the hosts. He also devoted tremendous energy to create a new revenue stream

¹²¹⁰ See interview with Mgr. Simon Héroux by Ryan Lux, September 17, 2020, 47:58 mins., original: « *Et vous savez, c'est quand tout est cher, dans un tel contexte, la plupart des gens s'attardent, s'il faut ceci, s'il faut cela, il faut deux voitures, ce n'est pas facile. Vous savez, il y a le fait d'amener les gens à se préparer au baptême, parce qu'ils sont déjà très, très, très, très occupés, et dans certains cas surchargés de travail* ».

¹²¹¹ See interview with Michel Côté by Ryan Lux, September 14, 2020, 7:25 mins., original: « *Cela remonte, je dirais, à 2005, lorsque la paroisse de Saint-Edmond a constaté qu'elle avait des problèmes de financement, liés en grande partie à la fréquentation de l'église, qui était en baisse, sans augmenter, de sorte qu'il y avait moins de fréquentation, de sorte qu'il y avait nécessairement moins de participation financière sous quelque forme que ce soit. Qu'il s'agisse de la quête dominicale lors du service religieux, d'un don personnel, de la dîme, qui est réglementée par la loi provinciale. Il y avait un besoin non satisfait et une reconnaissance du sous-financement* ».

for the Parish by making a deal with Saint-Edmond's municipal council to lease the church. In this way, Saint-Edmond was able to continue celebrating Mass as long as it did¹²¹².

2. *A Difficult Marriage: Parish Fusion*

Before proceeding to discuss the church's transformation to a multifunctional community centre, it bears pausing briefly to look more closely at Saint-Edmond's fusion experience. As with virtually every other church closure in Quebec, in Saint-Edmond, closure was preceded by fusion. Although it is common for adjacent parishes to have different cultures and ways of doing things, usually based on class, these differences pale in comparison to the distinctions between Saint-Edmond and its new Mother church, Saint-Germain. Côté explained the concept of "Mother Church" as akin to a county seat and justified Saint-Germain's status as such by its much larger population of 4,500 parishioners – as with Saint-Edmond, basically everyone in Saint-Germain is nominally Catholic – and by its perennity as the oldest of the fused parishes. For that reason, he saw it as natural that the presidency of the parish council should be held by someone like himself from the headquarters of the new parish¹²¹³. As with most fusions, the new parish comprised three former parishes, each of which are represented by two churchwardens on the six-person parish council.

Painfully aware that their financial situation was untenable, and already sharing a priest, Ginette Letendre said that parishioners were initially optimistic about the possibilities of the fusion. Borne out of a desire to worship according to their rural sensibilities, Saint-Edmondois have always

¹²¹² *Idem.*, 1:03:21 mins., original: « J'ai donc beaucoup fonctionné de cette manière. Un marguillier qui soumettait une dépense au conseil disait : Avez-vous fait appel à un bénévole ? Ou avez-vous essayé d'obtenir un donateur ? ».

¹²¹³ *Idem.*, 4:40 mins., original: « Comme si c'était l'église mère. Et en termes de taille, Saint-Germain à l'époque, en 2013, devait avoir une population d'environ 4 200, 4 300 habitants aussi, par rapport à Saint-Eugène autour de 1 000 et Saint-Edmond, autour de 500, 600. Donc il y avait une certaine logique à dire on va donner la priorité à une présidence de Saint-Germain ».

marched to a different drummer than their more urban neighbours, a distinction which created some friction in the new marriage. Even though the three parishes had been sharing a priest for decades and were used to having to sometimes attend each other's churches to suit their schedules, their new status as a single parish encouraged engaged Edmondois parishioners that they might have some input into adapting the liturgy at Saint-Germain to include some of their innovations.

Ginette Letendre's hopes in this line were dashed almost immediately:

At some point you'd have expected that, since the three parishes had been merged into one and that we'd be doing many of the Masses at Saint-Germain, well, you'd have expected them to ask for a little collaboration from time to time, but no, that didn't happen. You know, I've got friends who've overseen our choir for years, and no, they never asked them to help¹²¹⁴.

Whereas parishioners of Saint-Edmond were used to the modern musical accompaniment of guitars and drums, Saint-Germain privileged the baroque harmonies of their organ's 12 stops¹²¹⁵, which, to the sensibilities of Saint-Edmondois, "leans hard on the keys"¹²¹⁶. The same challenges presented themselves liturgically. While theoretically, liturgy in the Catholic Church is universal and established in Rome, in practice there is considerable latitude in its expression. "We weren't afraid of doing something new. Even then, even if it didn't always please the priest because he preferred something more traditional, but he'd only come here for Mass and then he'd leave. Then

¹²¹⁴ See interview with Ginette Letendre by Ryan Lux, September 18, 2020, 38:52 mins., original: « *Nous aurions pu nous attendre à ce qu'il célèbre des messes à Saint-Germain, étant donné la fusion des trois paroisses en une seule, nous aurions pu nous attendre à ce qu'il demande un peu de coopération de temps en temps, mais non, cela ne s'est pas produit. Vous savez, j'ai des amis qui font partie de la chorale depuis des années. Oui, et ensuite. Non, on ne leur a jamais demandé de le faire* ».

¹²¹⁵ An organ stop is a component of a pipe organ that admits pressurized air into a set of organ pipes.

¹²¹⁶ *Idem.*, 41:00 mins., original: « *Oui. Et tu sais, la musique, ça a toujours été un peu le même, les choix des chants, la chorale, tout ça, c'est quelque chose de plus moderne. On n'y avait pas de grands orgues, nous autres là, tu sais, donc c'étaient les guitares, et des fois y'avait de la batterie. Puis tu sais, même un piano là, mais là-bas, elle a le grand orgue, celui qui est là pèse fort ses pitons* ».

it was up to the rest of us to do things our own way”¹²¹⁷. When they had their Masses in Saint-Edmond, Letendre would make sure to link the message to local issues and use it as a forum to organise and promote village happenings. That important aspect of the celebration for Saint-Edmontois simply did not exist at Saint-Germain – it was not theirs¹²¹⁸. But most often, Saint-Edmontois could attend a Mass at their own church, even if there was not always a priest there to preside over it; in this way they retained some liturgical and legal autonomy. So, for four years, from 2013 until late 2017 when Mayor Corriveau and his anti-conservation council locked up the church for good, at least the dwindling number of regular practising Catholics could periodically celebrate the Eucharist in their home church, which they shared with the community for secular uses.

3. *Passing the Torch and Extinguishment*

Only one month after a slate of pro-church conservation candidates swept the 2013 municipal elections, the Diocese, seeing the goodwill, seized the opportunity, and fused Saint-Edmond parish with those of Saint-Germain and Saint-Eugène, thereby avoiding the need to close Saint-Edmond’s register upon the transfer of the church to the municipality by signing a lease for 18 months.

As a first step in the process of transferring responsibility for the church building from the Parish to the Municipality, the lease came at a good time. Letendre was proud that the Parish had avoided running deficits or requiring subsidies from the Diocese and that the proactive nature of the

¹²¹⁷ *Idem.*, 40:23 mins., original: « Il y a eu eux autres en ce qui concerne les célébrations. Comment dire ? Nous n'avions pas peur de faire quelque chose de nouveau. Même là, bien sûr, le prêtre n'était pas toujours content, parce qu'il était un peu plus traditionnel. Vous savez, il ne venait ici que pour la messe, puis il repartait. Ensuite, c'était à nous autres de faire les choses à notre manière ».

¹²¹⁸ *Idem.*, 34:56 mins., original: « Je faisais partie du conseil de fabrique, je faisais de l'animation pastorale, je préparais des célébrations et comme notre curé avait trois paroisses, pour en faire une; ben, vous savez, les célébrations ça se fait vite et tout ça. Alors j'ai travaillé à l'intérieur de tout ça, j'en ai fait tous les dimanches, j'ai fait le lien entre les nouvelles de la municipalité et la célébration quand on vivait, enfin, les événements, vous savez... ».

arrangement likewise served the village well, as they had recently sold their municipal hall, which had fallen into decrepitude¹²¹⁹. Meanwhile, the cooperation meant that Edmondois could continue worshipping. Both Letendre and Abbé Dubois estimated that between 30 and 40 people would attend Mass most Sundays¹²²⁰. The arrangement was especially propitious for Christmas, Easter, weddings, and funerals, religious celebrations which continued to predictably fill the church. Eventually, attendance dropped off significantly to the point where just eight to 10 people would celebrate Mass in the church choir instead of the nave, and in the winter, to save money on heat, the remaining parishioners moved their celebration into the sacristy¹²²¹. Against the wishes of the newly elected Mayor Corriveau and despite concerted lobbying, Mgr. Héroux approved the sale negotiated by Mayor Auger and council in early 2017 and until November, the perennity of religious services in Saint-Edmond-de-Grantham seemed to be assured. All that changed in November when the anti-conservation slate swept the municipal election and permanently locked the church doors. Unlike in Rimouski or Quebec, parishioners would not get another glimpse of their church's interior.

After losing the church, parishioners moved their Eucharistic celebration to a room in the small village recreation hall built behind the church in 2011. The change in venue further decimated

¹²¹⁹ *Idem.*, 6:43 mins., original: « Vous savez, la gestion a été assez rigoureuse. Nous n'avons jamais eu de déficit par rapport à d'autres municipalités où les diocèses ont injecté de l'argent. Et tout cela. Cela a pris beaucoup de temps. Parce que très vite, maintenant, en 2012, je crois, il y a eu une offre de la municipalité pour fermer le projet et créer un centre communautaire. Nous avons aussi une salle paroissiale ici, si vous voulez, mais elle était assez obsolète. Et puis nous avons vu l'opportunité, nous nous sommes dit, si la municipalité pouvait acquérir l'église, elle pourrait facilement être transformée en salle communautaire ».

¹²²⁰ See interview with Abbé Gilles Dubois by Ryan Lux, September 14, 2020, 1:40 mins., original: « À l'époque, je dirais que 30 ou 40 personnes assistaient régulièrement à la messe ».

¹²²¹ See interview with Ginette Letendre by Ryan Lux, September 18, 2020, 8:23 mins., original: « À l'époque, l'église était fermée pendant un certain temps, par souci d'économie, surtout en automne et au début de l'été, et les offices se déroulaient donc dans la sacristie. Au début, nous étions peut-être une quarantaine, mais à la fin, le dimanche, nous étions dix dans la chorale. Vous savez, la pratique religieuse n'était pas la même ».

regular participation to as low as five people, including the priest¹²²². This situation persisted, even while just a stone's throw away, in February 2019 the church was being demolished. Then, in March 2020, Covid-19 arrived, meaning that Masses were cancelled and would never again be said in Saint-Edmond-de-Grantham outside of the annual pilgrimage to the shrine of Our Lady of Lourdes. Abbé Dubois explained that celebrating Mass in the recreation hall was not an adequate substitute.

People who came to Mass on Sunday didn't think it was very pious; it wasn't a religious setting. It's a recreational setting. So, when there are people playing around, young people shouting around, the atmosphere isn't there, it's not there at all. People were very disappointed by that¹²²³.

In any case, Dubois pointed out that given the difficult step of ceasing religious services in the village had already been taken, it hardly made sense to go backward, especially to a bitterly divided Saint-Edmond-de-Grantham riddled with bitter feelings.

³The regulars in the little box [recreation hall], they'll come here [Saint-Germain] or they'll go there [Saint-Eugène] they will keep going to Mass. I think they're aware of what's happened, and they understand it, and they're willing to make the trip. So, I'm talking about the future, because if they get into the habit of moving around, are we going to reopen there and risk more negativity?¹²²⁴

¹²²² See interview with Michel Côté by Ryan Lux, September 14, 2020, 41:05 mins., original: « *Et même juste avant la pandémie, malgré la destruction de l'église Saint-Edmond, on a continué à célébrer la messe le dimanche. Cinq, six, sept, le nombre maximum de personnes, si l'on compte le prêtre. Cela se passait au rez-de-chaussée du service des loisirs* ».

¹²²³ See interview with Abbé Gilles Dubois by Ryan Lux, September 14, 2020, 12:31 mins., original: « *Ce n'est pas possible. Peut-être que lorsque tout sera terminé, nous pourrions recommencer. Mais vous savez, ils ne pensent pas que ce soit très pieux ; ce n'est pas un cadre religieux. C'est un lieu de loisirs. Alors quand il y a des gens qui jouent, des jeunes qui crient, l'ambiance n'est pas là, elle n'est pas là du tout. Les gens sont très déçus par cette situation* ».

¹²²⁴ *Idem.*, 13:21 mins., original: « *Je dirais que ceux qui sont ici, qui étaient des habitués de la petite boîte, viennent ici ou vont là, cela n'a pas beaucoup d'importance pour leur pratique. Je pense qu'ils sont conscients de ce qui s'est passé et qu'ils le comprennent. Et ils sont en mouvement. Je parle donc de l'avenir, car s'ils prennent l'habitude de se déplacer, allons-nous rouvrir cet établissement et risquer de recevoir encore plus de commentaires négatifs ?* ».

Thus, Saint-Edmond's religious transformation – a decline in practice, failure of intergenerational transmission, financial difficulties, fusion, sale, and closure – was similar to most church closures in Quebec, even if the social and political climate in which it occurred was totally unprecedented. Before moving on to discuss its treatment by the political sphere, it is instructive to situate the closure's religious dimensions within its diocesan context, not only because of Nicolet's particularities compared with other Quebec dioceses, but also to describe just how starkly the experience of Saint-Edmond contrasts with those of its neighbours.

4. *Weathering the Secular Storm: The Surprising Stability of Nicolet*

Saint-Edmond-de-Grantham's histrionic experience of church closure is more unusual given its diocesan context. Even though Nicolet has more churches per capita than all of Quebec's other 19 dioceses, Vicar General Mgr. Simon Héroux noted that there have only been 26 closures and four demolitions out of the 96 churches operating in 1998, it has experienced by far the least of all dioceses¹²²⁵. Of these, he insisted that the saga of Saint-Edmond-de-Grantham was an anomaly, the result of pre-existing social divisions non-existent in the diocese's other rural communities. "I think that's the saddest and most scandalous story. I think the way it happened was all wrong"¹²²⁶.

Acknowledging that demolitions are sometimes, but rarely necessary, he insisted rather that every effort should be made to find a new vocation for closed churches. "These churches mean a lot to many people in this area, even if there are many people who have abandoned religious practice, that doesn't mean they don't care about their heritage"¹²²⁷. Religion has always played an outsized

¹²²⁵ See Monique Bellemare, « Les églises du Québec : Nicolet », *Patrimoine du Québec*, (blog), consulted August 27, 2024, <https://patrimoineduQuebec.com/eglisesduQuebec/nicolet/>

¹²²⁶ See interview with Mgr. Simon Héroux by Ryan Lux, September 17, 2020, 2:53 mins., original: « Oui, je pense que c'est l'histoire la plus triste et la plus scandaleuse. Je ne pense pas qu'elle soit vécue de la bonne manière ».

¹²²⁷ *Idem.*, 3:52 mins., original: « Saint-Edmond est un cas particulier. Nous essayons toujours de trouver une nouvelle vocation à ce bâtiment qui est au cœur d'une paroisse. Une église représente beaucoup pour beaucoup de gens dans cette région, et même si certains ont abandonné la pratique religieuse, cela ne veut pas dire qu'ils ne tiennent pas à leur patrimoine ».

role in the diocese of Nicolet, which might explain why it continues to be such an outlier compared to other dioceses with respect to its efforts to keep churches, if not as places of worship, at least still open to the public. Of the new vocations of its closed churches, only three have been transformed for private functions, whereas the other 23 have been either purchased by local governments or not-for-profits¹²²⁸.

For most of its history, Nicolet was such fertile ground for religious vocations that they had to export the clergy trained at their enormous diocesan seminary, which now serves as a school to train Quebec's future police officers. "We had so many priests that when the diocese of Mont-Laurier was founded, for example, the bishop at the time gave twelve priests to the new diocese, and we even sent priests to Brazil"¹²²⁹. When Héroux arrived in the diocese in 1972, he said there were 84 parishes and one mission. Now he told me it was "a whole other world"¹²³⁰

The 'new' seminary, built in 1955, operated until 1969 when Nicolet's seminarists began earning bachelor's degrees in theology from the University du Québec à Trois-Rivières. In fact, Mgr. Héroux admitted that it had been years since the diocese produced new vocations. But with 82 priests, he assured me that unlike other dioceses, Nicolet has not yet turned to foreign priests to fill its ranks¹²³¹. For comparison's sake, both Gatineau and Nicolet have 51 functional churches. Whereas Nicolet has 82 priests serving, Gatineau has just 50¹²³². Although Nicolet is relatively

¹²²⁸ See Ryan Lux, « Inventory of Québec Church Closures 1998-2024 ». Annex I.

¹²²⁹ See interview with Mgr. Simon Héroux by Ryan Lux, September 17, 2020, 23:53 mins., original: « *À un moment donné, nous avons tellement de prêtres que lorsque le diocèse de Mont-Laurier a été fondé, par exemple, l'évêque de l'époque a donné douze prêtres au nouveau diocèse, et nous avons des prêtres qui partaient au Brésil* ».

¹²³⁰ *Idem.*, 28:01 mins., original: « *Et voilà, la vie a tellement, tellement changé. Vous voyez, je suis arrivé ici en 1972. C'était un monde complètement différent et une Église complètement différente aujourd'hui. Quand je suis arrivé ici, nous avons 84 paroisses. Et puis, si vous voulez, une mission pour les Abénaquis* ».

¹²³¹ *Idem.*, 24:00 mins., original: « *Ce n'est plus le cas. Nous n'avons pas de séminaristes. Nous ne devons pas encore faire venir des prêtres de l'étranger. Mais jusqu'à présent, nous avons pu fonctionner avec les prêtres que nous avons, car nous avons beaucoup de prêtres diocésains. À l'exception d'autres diocèses de la même taille* ».

¹²³² See Assemblée des évêques catholiques du Québec (AECQ).

robust compared to other anaemic Quebec dioceses, Mgr. Hérroux was careful to highlight that the Southshore countryside has not been immune to religious decline.

It's true that our parishes are less practising, and it is hard to find volunteers. It's not easy to replace them. There aren't many people under 60 who are interested in getting involved at the moment. But we're trying to encourage as many as possible to volunteer. But for the moment, things aren't moving¹²³³.

Volunteers, however, are not in short supply when it comes time to transform the diocese's churches. Across Nicolet Diocese, and especially in Saint-Edmond-de-Grantham, church transformations have given rural communities unifying projects to rally around and an opportunity for the re-appropriation of their churches. In Saint-Edmond-de-Grantham, this process was initially marked by the same consensus and cooperation between the religious and political spheres as other Nicoletain communities.

D. Political Sphere: a religious heritage microcosm

1. Consensus or Echo Chamber

It is vital to underscore that until 2015, Saint-Edmond's closure reflected established patterns of rural church closures characterised by a consensual transfer of responsibility from parishes to municipalities. The pattern is based on the pragmatic recognition that most people in the village used the church in some capacity and if it could no longer be supported by religious activities alone, it was in the community's interest to take responsibility for what is often their only social infrastructure. In a village of around 700 people, like Saint-Edmond, there is virtually no degree of separation between the churchwardens and the municipal councillors. Both figures tend

¹²³³ *Idem.*, 28:01 mins., original: « Il est vrai que nous commençons à avoir des problèmes avec le bénévolat. Nos paroisses actuelles sont de moins en moins pratiquantes et il n'est pas facile de remplacer nos bénévoles. Mais si vous voulez, il n'y a pas beaucoup de personnes de moins de 60 ans qui ont envie de s'engager en ce moment. Mais en faisant du bénévolat, nous essayons d'en réanimer le plus possible. Mais pour l'instant, ce n'est pas le cas ».

to be leaders and organisers and in Saint-Edmond, they were friends. This type of situation made it easy to facilitate a transition.

‘Transitional’ is a good way to describe Saint-Edmond-de-Grantham in 2013. Leading up to that year’s election, the outgoing council was wrapping up unfinished business in a flurry and aside from longtime Mayor Marie-Andrée Auger, the entire council decided not to seek re-election. Aliette Lajoie ran and won in the 2013 municipal election, and she described the period leading up to it as one marked by intense change, at least for a small village. Multiple dossiers overlapped and required a big idea to resolve them. For example, all of the municipality’s assets were in flux, such as the sale of the old town office, the construction of the small recreation hall, the question of the decrepit garage, the acquisition of the rectory for the new town office, moving the library from the rectory to the former credit union building, and, of course, the white elephant, the future of the church. Lajoie and her fellow new councillors saw the acquisition of the church as an obvious panacea, “And so? Those were all the reasons that brought me and the other members of the council to the table, and we were all of the opinion that the church should be preserved”¹²³⁴.

Lajoie’s fellow councillor Jean-Claude Paradis remembered that “everyone agreed with the project for the community centre. Everyone wanted it”¹²³⁵. He and others took it upon themselves to get the project underway as soon as the council signed the lease with the Parish in a manner akin to the traditional practice of the *corvée* – the practice of unpaid collective labour dedicated to public works, typically performed in an enthusiastic and celebratory manner – or what we call ‘work bees’ in the Anglosphere. This strategy had its advantages for the cash-strapped municipality.

¹²³⁴ See interview with Aliette Lajoie by Ryan Lux, September 15, 2020, 4:30 mins., original: « *Et alors ? Ce sont toutes les raisons qui nous ont amenés, moi et les autres membres du conseil d'administration, à la table des négociations, et nous étions tous d'avis que le bâtiment devait être préservé* ».

¹²³⁵ See interview with Jean-Claude Paradis by Ryan Lux, September 15, 2020, 4:40 mins., original: « *Tout le monde était d'accord avec le projet de centre communautaire. Tout le monde voulait le centre communautaire* ».

Because the church still technically belonged to the Parish, Lajoie explained, it could be renovated by volunteers, was not obliged to make official calls for tenders, and not subject to the same degree of modern building standards¹²³⁶.

Parish council president Michel Côté outlined the strategy. In addition to the former autonomous parish's remaining capital of \$20,000, which the new parish was happy to leave in the community, the village granted subsidies to the Parish for renovations, supplemented by private donations – totalling roughly \$150,000 spent on the transformation. The fused parish of Notre-Dame-de-Lourdes floated the transformation committee \$50,000 which it recouped with the eventual 2016 sale to the municipality¹²³⁷.

Parish council president, Michel Côté and fellow volunteers consistently found ways to drive down high-cost estimates cited by the slowly but steadily growing group of naysayers. For example, when the furnace needed replacing, “they put a huge figure on it. I said if we could do it, let’s do the work at a lower cost, we did so”¹²³⁸. Over the four-year mandate of the pro-conservation council, the church, where council meetings were held, was transformed through collective effort, considerable personal donations, and community support for the activities hosted there, such as dances, pickle ball, and community suppers – among other things. Ginette Letendre fondly recalled

¹²³⁶ See interview with Aliette Lajoie by Ryan Lux, September 15, 2020, 5:00 mins., original: « *La différence est qu'un bâtiment appartenant à la fabrique peut être rénové et amélioré par des bénévoles. Lorsqu'il appartient à la municipalité, c'est complètement différent. Tout le monde doit respecter les règles établies par la Régie du bâtiment. Les appels d'offres sont donc plus coûteux* ».

¹²³⁷ See interview with Michel Côté by Ryan Lux, September 14, 2020, 21:55 mins., original: « *Notre investissement total s'élevait à environ 150 000 \$. Mais cet investissement de 150 000 \$ comprenait des subventions municipales. Lorsque je les ai déduites pour calculer le prix de vente, oui, nous avons reçu des subventions d'autres organisations. Je les ai également déduites au moment de la vente. Parce qu'il ne s'agissait pas de fonds provenant de la paroisse Notre-Dame-de-Lourdes. Je sais que nous l'avons vendu pour 55 000 \$. Cela correspondait à un besoin d'environ 50 000 \$. Nous avons investi 50 000 \$, nous avons donc obtenu un bon retour sur investissement* ».

¹²³⁸ See interview with Jean-Claude Paradis by Ryan Lux, September 15, 2020, 49:45 mins., original: « *Lorsque le four a dû être remplacé, ils ont demandé un prix exorbitant. J'ai dit que si nous pouvions le faire, nous devrions le faire à moindre coût, et c'est ce que nous avons fait* ».

the period as having renewed the community's spirit: "Because, you know, when it comes down to it, there are a lot of things we can get together on... And there was a lot, a lot, a lot, a lot of volunteer work involved"¹²³⁹. But not everyone was on board. A harbinger of the conflict that was to come, Paradis said, was the notable absence of volunteers from the suburban-style developments. Referring to the social pressure from that clan's leadership, Paradis chided, "for the others, it was strictly forbidden to get involved"¹²⁴⁰.

While consensus reigned and goodwill was not lacking, an essential ingredient for the preservation of the church was missing: money. What was needed was money from outside of the community. Council applied for various subsidies throughout its mandate, "but there were always obstacles", Lajoie lamented." We didn't get the grants we had applied for. Then there was a change of government in the spring of 2014, and federal subsidies were refused. So, there were no more grants for these projects"¹²⁴¹. Worse yet, each refusal eroded support for the church project and opened the door for an increasingly strident opposition led by the development lobby and its constituency of New Arrivals, begging the question of how unanimous initial support for the project really was – and whose opinions counted to the Old Stock.

2. *A Startling Majority Speaks: Grassroots Anti-conservation*

As it seemed increasingly likely that Saint-Edmond would have to finance its church conversion project on its own, whispers of opposition turned into rumbles. Like many other communities'

¹²³⁹ See interview with Ginette Letendre by Ryan Lux, September 18, 2020, 9:00 mins., original: « *Parce que tu sais, dans le fond, il y avait bien des choses à nous rallier ensemble ... Puis il y a eu beaucoup, beaucoup, beaucoup, beaucoup de bénévolat là-dedans* ».

¹²⁴⁰ See interview with Jean-Claude Paradis by Ryan Lux, September 15, 2020, 46:30 mins., original: « *Pour eux autres, c'est bien défendu de s'impliquer. Ah ça, oui* ».

¹²⁴¹ See interview with Aliette Lajoie by Ryan Lux, September 15, 2020, 5:15 mins., original: « *Mais, il y avait toujours, toujours des embûches. Les subventions qui avaient été demandées, on ne les a pas eues. Après, il y a eu un changement de gouvernement au printemps 2014, des subventions au fédéral, ça a été refusé. Et là, il y en avait plus des subventions pour ces projets-là* ».

political discourse, opposition to what seemed like a publicly popular project was sown online via social media. Jean-Claude Paradis said the real estate developer, previously identified as Manon Rodier, the leader of the anti-conservation clan, whose road subsidies council denied, started spreading online rumours. “She's powerful, she has credibility. She denigrated us. She constantly told everyone that we were pocketing money, lining our pockets along with the priest”¹²⁴². With rumours swirling, and as a protest movement formed against the municipal purchase of the church, discourse migrated from its online home to the subdivisions, where neighbours discussed strategy along the shady streets of *Le Patelin* and *Le Nordique* residential developments.

Aliette Lajoie identified the leader's rousing support to defeat the project, musing,

[w]ell, how can I explain that? The same councillors who were in office in 2012, who had started this shift towards using the church as a municipal hall, turned against us when we were in power. And then they started to oppose us, stopping us from visiting the citizens and then to mount a bit of a cabal¹²⁴³.

She explained that by convincing fiscally oriented Newcomer residents of the new subdivisions that the project would lead to reckless spending, the real estate speculator enlisted the politically savvy Reynald Girard to organise an effective opposition. Girard explained his campaign against transforming the church into a community hub was a numbers game. “Let's say there were 150 to 200 people who didn't want anything to do with politics in our extended group, and then there were

¹²⁴² See interview with Jean-Claude Paradis by Ryan Lux, September 15, 2020, 7:15 mins., original: « *Elle est puissante, elle a de la crédibilité. Elle nous a dénigrés. Elle n'a cessé de dire à tout le monde que nous empochions de l'argent, que nous nous enrichissions avec le prêtre* ».

¹²⁴³ See interview with Aliette Lajoie by Ryan Lux, September 15, 2020, 10:14 mins., original: « *Eh bien, comment expliquer cela ? Les mêmes conseillers municipaux qui étaient en fonction en 2012, qui avaient amorcé cette transition vers l'utilisation de l'église comme salle municipale, se sont retournés contre nous lorsque nous étions au pouvoir. Ils ont alors commencé à s'opposer à nous, à rendre visite aux citoyens, puis à monter une petite cabale* ».

about 80 on the other side”¹²⁴⁴. Despite their apathy, Girard found it easy to persuade the typically indifferent-to-local-issues New Arrivals by appealing to their pocketbooks.

As members of the council and their supporters became more and more enthusiastic about the potential for the transformation, still confident that outside funding would materialise, Girard complained that the cost estimates ballooned to unacceptable levels approaching \$1 million. Ideas included retrofitting the basement to house the library, and installing a full gymnasium in the nave, all on top of the need for a new heating system, floors, and structural stabilisation.

[T]here are just 451 taxpayers in Saint-Edmond and personally, I thought it was completely stupid to spend almost \$1 million, especially since there's no need for it here. That's the main point. There aren't many people in Saint-Edmond and for all those needs you can just go elsewhere¹²⁴⁵.

Therein lies the difference in approaches between the two politics. Whereas Old Stock residents took pride in self-sufficiency and cultivating local social interactions, new residents, like Girard, who were used to meeting their needs elsewhere, could simply not justify the added cost of unnecessarily overlapping services. Each camp employed a series of strategies to pursue their divergent interests.

Girard took exception to the Old Stock's backdoor approach to financing renovations intended for municipal use through the Parish. “This new council was full of manoeuvres and shenanigans, with the help of one of the councillors who was a millionaire”¹²⁴⁶. He alleged that Paradis had

¹²⁴⁴ See interview with Reynald Girard by Ryan Lux, September 17, 2020, mins., original: « *Mettons qu'il y avait entre 150 et 200 personnes qui ne s'intéressaient pas à la politique dans notre groupe élargi, et environ 80 dans le camp adverse* ».

¹²⁴⁵ *Idem.*, 7:30 mins., original: « *Il n'y a que 451 contribuables à Saint-Edmond et, personnellement, je trouvais complètement stupide de dépenser près d'un million de dollars, d'autant plus que cela n'est pas nécessaire ici. C'est le point essentiel. Il n'y a pas beaucoup d'habitants à Saint-Edmond et pour tous ces besoins, vous pouvez simplement aller ailleurs* ».

¹²⁴⁶ *Idem.*, 8:45 mins., original : « *Ce nouveau conseil était plein de manœuvres et de magouilles, avec l'aide d'un des conseillers, qui était millionnaire* ».

loaned the money for improvements that would have scandalised Saint-Edmond's taxpayers if they had to pass through the municipal process. So opposed was Girard that he personally sought, but ultimately failed to obtain, a legal injunction to prevent further expenditures on the church. More successfully, he penned and circulated a petition demanding popular consultation.

We couldn't block the heating system or other improvements that had been made to the interior in a totally illegal way. We even asked for an investigation by the provincial Permanent Anti-corruption Unit, which didn't want to get involved because it's the Church¹²⁴⁷.

Meanwhile, Abbé Dubois and Jean-Claude Paradis blamed Girard and his movement for its incessant efforts to stymie renovations by diverting their efforts to fighting bureaucratic manoeuvres. Abbé Dubois, who supported the transformation of what was still after all his parish, complained that if it was not one thing the matter, it was another. "There were a lot of things that were done to try and hinder the renovations that were underway"¹²⁴⁸. Opponents reported the renovations to the building inspectors and claimed that the steeple and floors were unsafe. The priest said that, as a result of the complaints, the Parish had to furnish the inspectors with engineering and architectural reports. "So, it costs so much. But afterwards everything was deemed to be fine, but you know that because of the disputes and the complaints, it cost us \$1,600"¹²⁴⁹. Paradis condemned another of the grassroots civil society's tactics, which was the zero-sum characterisation of the decision between conserving the church or building a brand-new

¹²⁴⁷ *Idem.*, 29:00 mins., original: « Nous ne pouvions pas bloquer le système de chauffage ou d'autres améliorations qui avaient été apportées à l'intérieur de manière totalement illégale. Nous avons même demandé une enquête à l'Unité permanente de lutte contre la corruption de la province, qui n'a pas voulu s'impliquer parce qu'il s'agit de l'Église ».

¹²⁴⁸ See interview with Abbé Gilles Dubois by Ryan Lux, September 14, 2020, 3:19 mins., original: « Puis là, il y a eu un tas de choses qui étaient arrivées pour essayer de freiner les rénovations qui se faisaient. Des gens faisaient des plaintes à Régie du bâtiment, la Régie des bâtiments venait nous voir ».

¹²⁴⁹ *Idem.*, 4:30 mins., original: « Donc, cela a coûté très cher. Mais après coup, tout a été jugé satisfaisant, mais vous savez qu'en raison des litiges et des plaintes, cela nous a coûté 1 600 \$ ».

community centre – an alternative based on nothing more than conjecture¹²⁵⁰. For Mgr. Héroux, the worst part of this tactical period was the fact that each side took to the press to wage a mediatised war with one another and, in so doing, aired the village's dirty laundry for the entertainment of the rest of the region all the while dragging the Church into the mire. Via a volley of sensational letters to the editor and legal tactics from both sides, Mgr. Héroux argued both clans amplified the conflict.

That doesn't mean that in parishes like Saint-Edmond, there aren't disputes. We didn't invent that, but it's another thing to put everything in the newspapers, in the opinion pages, in the media, in the courts before the judges¹²⁵¹.

3. *Three votes one issue: La Guerre d'un Clocher*

“Referendum”, by-election, general election, Saint-Edmond went to the polls three times over the church between 2015 and 2017. The political wrangling started when Girard escalated hostilities with the pro-conservation group, Old Stock families used to being at the helm of village affairs, in June 2015 when he circulated a petition which gathered 311 residents' signatures opposing the project. His petition, which roughly represented the population living in the Newcomer dominated subdivisions, rendered Saint-Edmond's tacit social division into an explicit political confrontation. The heightened political stakes stoked social tensions and ushered in a never-before-seen period of intimidation in Saint-Edmond-de-Grantham.

¹²⁵⁰ See interview with Jean-Claude Paradis by Ryan Lux, September 15, 2020, 30:25 mins., original: « *Et ils disent qu'il y aura de l'argent, qu'il y aura des subventions pour construire un nouveau centre. Oui, c'est ça, ils n'ont pas d'argent* ».

¹²⁵¹ See interview with Mgr. Simon Héroux by Ryan Lux, September 17, 2020, 49:55 mins., original: « *Cela ne veut pas dire que dans des paroisses comme Saint-Edmond, il n'y a pas de conflits. Nous n'avons pas inventé cela, mais c'est autre chose que de tout mettre dans les journaux, dans les pages d'opinion, dans les médias, devant les tribunaux et les juges* ».

a) *Referendum*

With their petition for a public consultation on the church transformation project submitted to council, Girard and his allies expected to resolve the conflict once and for all. The consultation, styled as a “referendum” on their church’s fate, took place in October and asked residents: “Would you like the municipality to buy the church and convert it into a municipal hall at a cost of \$915,000?”. The results were overwhelmingly in favour of scrapping the project, with 252 residents opposing it and 111 in support. Parish council president Michel Côté took exception with the question crediting the win to the disingenuous question. He chided that, “results are always circumstantial to the question being asked”¹²⁵²

After the consultation, however, the Quebec government agreed that the excise tax on gasoline could be used for community infrastructure, in addition to transportation networks. For the pro-church transformation council, this nullified the referendum results due to the newly available “free” \$250,000 over five years, which could pay for the remaining work on the church¹²⁵³. Council’s decision to proceed with purchasing the church inflamed its opponents, who viewed the rationale as a technicality. Council meetings were attended at a level yet unseen and as mentioned above, violence broke out on at least one occasion, inside the still-consecrated church. Paradis recalled the 2016 meeting, describing it as

terrible. It was a sacred place where everyone shouted at each other. It was perfect for the journalist. Yes, he was writing everything down. If it was a quiet

¹²⁵² See interview with Michel Côté by Ryan Lux, September 14, 2020, 28:40 mins., original: « *Les résultats sont toujours circonstanciels par rapport à la question posée* ».

¹²⁵³ See interview with Abbé Gilles Dubois by Ryan Lux, September 14, 2020, 7:03 mins., original: « *Évidemment, nous aurions continué avec la formule que nous avions auparavant. Et l'ancien conseil municipal de Mme. Auger avait demandé au gouvernement fédéral que la taxe d'accise soit affectée à la rénovation de l'église. Au final, nous avons obtenu environ 250 000 dollars de cette manière* ».

evening, the journalist wouldn't have had anything to write about. It would be boring for him¹²⁵⁴.

The municipal councillor was also targeted at his home, where vandals fired at his house with red paintballs¹²⁵⁵. But according to Girard, the intimidation was reciprocal. He said that the council hired a security guard, nominally to assure decorum, but that he suspected the true intention was to intimidate council opposition¹²⁵⁶.

b) By-election

Perhaps it was owing to this toxic climate that Mayor Marie-Andrée Auger resigned in May 2016, six months after the referendum loss, countless chaotic council meetings, and polarising political machinations. Pro-church residents and council now faced the risk of a campaign with the potential to thwart their decision to proceed with the purchase of the church. Despite the October consultation, Paradis wondered what could be so urgent as to resign with only thirteen months left of the term. “If she resigned a month later, there wouldn't have been an election. There was an election and the others won. We weren't able to”¹²⁵⁷. If the pro-church council was optimistic that they could finish the church in their remaining 13 months and to use that time to demonstrate the wisdom of the project, the mayor's resignation fatally reduced the timeframe. As a result, the by-election crystallised each clan's political program vis-à-vis the church purchase.

¹²⁵⁴ See interview with Jean-Claude Paradis by Ryan Lux, September 15, 2020, 28:20 mins., original: « *C'était horrible. C'était un lieu sacré, où tout le monde se criait dessus. C'était parfait pour le journaliste. Oui, il notait tout. Si la soirée avait été calme, le journaliste n'aurait rien eu à écrire. Ça aurait été ennuyeux pour lui* ».

¹²⁵⁵ *Idem.*, 29:04 mins., original: « *On a reçu un matin du harcèlement. Il y avait de la peinture rouge. Un paintball tiré sur ma maison sur les briques, puis sur les portes de garage* ».

¹²⁵⁶ See interview with Reynald Girard by Ryan Lux, September 17, 2020, 10:00mins., original: « *Ils ont engagé un agent de sécurité, sous prétexte de maintenir le décorum lors des réunions du conseil d'administration. Mais en réalité, c'était pour m'intimider. Ils m'ont intimidé* ».

¹²⁵⁷ See interview with Jean-Claude Paradis by Ryan Lux, September 15, 2020, 9:14 mins., original: « *Mme. Auger a démissionné treize mois avant la fin de son mandat. Si elle avait démissionné un mois plus tard, il n'y aurait pas eu d'élections. Il y a eu des élections, et les autres sont revenus. Nous n'étions pas capables. Mme. Aliette s'est présentée, mais elle n'a pas été élue* ».

“The Corriveau group said, we’re running for mayor now that there will be an election, but their only plan was to make the church disappear. He didn't want it around anymore”¹²⁵⁸. That was how Abbé Dubois’ summarised the New Arrivals’ electoral platform. From Girard’s perspective, a vote for Corriveau was the best way for Newcomers “to limit our taxes. So that the money, our money, was used for useful purposes, because, in the end, there was no need for it”¹²⁵⁹. Alternatively, sitting councillor, Aliette Lajoie summarised her motivation to run for mayor was essentially to ensure that anyone, but Corriveau was elected by challenging what she described as his campaign of misinformation. “If I didn't run, he was automatically elected. Let's just say that he wasn't the person we wanted working with us”¹²⁶⁰. Lajoie characterised the choice between herself and Corriveau as cut and dry. “I don't think it was much of an ideological question, it was a question of ... two opposing groups. And who's going to win? It's who's the strongest”¹²⁶¹. Judging by the results, Corriveau’s message won the day, but his opponents argued that its appeal lied in its simplicity. Essentially, he ran on one question: Do we want to invest in preserving Saint-Edmond’s past? Or do we want to look to the future and use tax dollars to foster more development?

Given the referendum results and her experiences on the campaign trail, the results hardly surprised Lajoie.

¹²⁵⁸ See interview with Abbé Gilles Dubois by Ryan Lux, September 14, 2020, 4:20 mins., original: « *Mais lorsqu'elle a démissionné, le groupe Corriveau a déclaré : « 'Je me présente à la mairie parce qu'il y a des élections.' Mais son idée, et celle de son groupe, était de se débarrasser de l'église. Ils n'en voulaient plus ».* »

¹²⁵⁹ See interview with Reynald Girard by Ryan Lux, September 17, 2020, 29:48 mins., original: « *Il s'agit de limiter nos impôts. Si l'argent, notre argent, est utilisé à des fins utiles, car il n'y en avait finalement pas besoin ».* »

¹²⁶⁰ See interview with Aliette Lajoie by Ryan Lux, September 15, 2020, 8:41 mins., original: « *Il y avait un autre candidat qui se présentait si je ne me présentais pas, lui était élu automatiquement. Disons que ce n'était pas la personne que nous souhaitions pour travailler avec nous ».* »

¹²⁶¹ *Idem.*, 16:18 mins., original: « *C'est difficile à dire. La question d'argent apparaît beaucoup en ligne de compte, parce qu'il y a eu beaucoup de désinformation à ce sujet-là. Mais je ne pense pas que c'était beaucoup une question idéologique, C'était une question comme on l'a dit tantôt, deux groupes qui s'affrontent. Et puis, c'est qui va gagner? C'est qui est le plus fort ».* »

It was in the two subdivisions that there was the most opposition. I saw this when I campaigned in 2016. Yes, we went everywhere. There were two of us – when I stood for election, I had to resign from my position. I found another person to run for the seat I held – and together we toured the municipality. And it was really more in the countryside, along the concession roads, than in the village, where we had the most support. So, it was clearly divided¹²⁶².

Robert Corriveau's October 2016 win, along with anti-church councillor anti-church Jules Lafleur – who replaced Lajoie – sent a strong message to villagers about their church's fate, but until the general election in November 2017, his would only be a minority voice on a pro-church dominated council. Abbé Gilles Dubois was initially optimistic that the dynamic would facilitate some kind of compromise, as neither party enjoyed absolute power to achieve their goals.

And in time, things could have improved. But no, the idea was to scrap the church because there was an anti-religious feeling, but also to replace it with a big brand-new community centre. They considered the referendum decisive and made politics out of it. But it's mostly just trickery to fool people and to achieve a goal. Yes, that's how I think of our politicians¹²⁶³.

During the following months, the council was embroiled in explosive meetings revolving around finalising the village's purchase of the church. With four members to two in support of the sale, Corriveau resorted to using his veto power again and again. While, legally, the four remaining councillors only had to reintroduce the motion, Corriveau's actions had a filibuster effect on

¹²⁶² *Idem.*, 12:40 mins., original: « C'est dans ces deux domaines que l'opposition était la plus forte. Je l'ai constaté moi-même lorsque j'ai mené ma campagne électorale en 2016. Oui, nous sommes allés partout. Je précise que nous étions deux. Lorsque je me suis présenté, j'ai dû démissionner de mon poste. J'ai trouvé quelqu'un d'autre pour briguer le siège que j'occupais, et ensemble, nous avons parcouru la municipalité. Et c'est vraiment dans les zones rurales, dans les rangs, que nous avons reçu le plus de soutien. Il y a donc clairement une division ».

¹²⁶³ See interview with Abbé Gilles Dubois by Ryan Lux, September 14, 2020, 29:33 mins., original: « Et avec le temps, les choses auraient pu s'améliorer. Mais non, l'idée était de le démolir en raison d'un sentiment antireligieux, mais aussi de le transformer en un tout nouveau centre communautaire. Ils ont considéré le référendum comme décisif, ses chiffres, et en ont fait une politique à cause de cela. Mais ce sont surtout des stratagèmes pour tromper les gens, pour atteindre un objectif. Oui, c'est ce que je pense de nos politiciens ».

completing renovations. “We didn't know that there was a deadline for completing this work. “It was December 31, 2017, and if it wasn't finished, we had to close the church, prevent people from entering, close the building”¹²⁶⁴. Despite setbacks, council finally forced the sale for \$55,000, as opposed to the symbolic \$1 sale initially proposed. The price difference reflected capital improvements made by the parish on the understanding of repayment¹²⁶⁵.

c) General Election and New Council

Once elected mayor Robert Corriveau vowed to stop the sale by any means possible, including trying to make a personal offer to purchase the church himself as well as lobbying the bishop to block the transfer to the municipality by refusing to desacralise the building¹²⁶⁶. Though he was unsuccessful, months of this sort of rhetoric emboldened his anti-church constituency and laid the groundwork for a landslide victory in 2017, fought on the single issue of the future of Saint-Edmond's church. Though the previous council spoke with one voice in their support of the church purchase – apart from the interim mayor Catherine Tubie, who supported heeding the consultation results¹²⁶⁷ - they did not run explicitly in the name of that cause. By 2017, local politics in the village had become so polarised that an unprecedented two full slates contested the election. Perhaps this turn of events was inevitable in an absolute single-issue race where there was no room

¹²⁶⁴ See interview with Aliette Lajoie by Ryan Lux, September 15, 2020, 19:00 mins., original: « *Nous ne savions apparemment pas qu'il y avait une date limite, une date butoir pour terminer ces travaux. C'était le 31 décembre 2017, et si les travaux n'étaient pas terminés, nous aurions dû fermer l'église, empêcher les gens d'y entrer et fermer le bâtiment* ».

¹²⁶⁵ *Idem.*, 22:05 mins., original: « *Eh bien, peut-être que cela n'a pas été très bien expliqué non plus. Les gens étaient mécontents que nous ayons fini par acheter le bâtiment. Ensuite, était-ce une bonne affaire ou non ?* ».

¹²⁶⁶ See interview with Mgr. Simon Héroux by Ryan Lux, September 17, 2020, 22:08 mins., original: « *Tout au long de ce processus, le maire de l'époque, M. Corriveau, et les opposants au projet voulaient s'assurer que l'évêque bloque les plans de la paroisse et ne les autorise pas. En d'autres termes, ils voulaient que l'évêque refuse de donner à la paroisse l'autorisation de vendre l'église. Donc, en gros, la désacralisation de l'évêque est nécessaire au moment où l'évêque donne son autorisation pour la vente de l'église, car s'il est d'accord avec la désacralisation, celle-ci doit être légale. Et l'évêque, pour désacraliser l'église, doit demander l'avis de ce qu'on appelle des conseils* ».

¹²⁶⁷ « *Le clocher de la discorde à Saint-Edmond-de-Grantham, Ici-Estrie*, September 8, 2016, (web), consulted September 19, 2024, <https://ici.radio-canada.ca/nouvelle/801893/eglise-centre-communautaire-saint-edmond-grantham>.

for middle ground. Reynald Girard organised the anti-conservation slate as part of his crusade to quash the community centre project.

I was the one who met with M. Corriveau and others, and I convinced them to run to get rid of the old council, which was determined to keep the church. The slate was elected in its entirety, with a mandate¹²⁶⁸.

Paradis was critical of the way the campaign unfolded in a style he compared to Donald Trump¹²⁶⁹. “And puerilely, what were they saying? If we kept the church, it would be expensive and it would be costly. Everyone was scared enough to vote for that gang”¹²⁷⁰. While praising his slate’s mayoral candidate, Aliette Lajoie, Paradis explained that her “calm, measured, and sound logic” was no match for Corriveau’s simple promise to reduce taxes by scrapping the church and to grow revenues by expanding development. The slate’s anti-church message swept all six candidates into power. The four new members of the council were notably all Newcomers and much younger than their predecessors. Reflecting on the results, Girard took considerable credit for his political curation of the new council. Indeed, he ‘got out the vote’ by picking up supporters and driving them to the polls. “We came out of it pretty good”, he mused satisfactorily¹²⁷¹. What Girard understatedly described as “pretty good”, Lajoie characterised as “radical” in reference to the total election sweep, which all but guaranteed the undoing of the pro-church clan’s years of effort.

¹²⁶⁸ See interview with by Ryan Lux, Reynald Girard, September 17, 2020, 15:54 mins., original: « *C'est moi-même qui ai rencontré M. Corriveau, j'en ai rencontré d'autres à chaque fois, je les ai rencontrés moi-même et je les ai convaincus de se présenter pour évincer l'ancien conseil qui voulait garder l'église et le conseil de bloc, qui était élu dans son intégralité, et avec le mandat* ».

¹²⁶⁹ See interview with Jean-Claude Paradis by Ryan Lux, September 15, 2020, 3:30 mins., original: « *C'est un cas unique. Ensuite, comme Trump, il a raconté suffisamment de mensonges pour que nous perdions les élections. Et nous ne savons pas s'il y en a d'autres. Il commence à apprendre un peu, mais il peut encore mentir. On dit qu'il comptait ses mensonges. On dit qu'il raconte en moyenne sept mensonges par jour* ».

¹²⁷⁰ *Idem.*, 2:48 mins., original: « *Mais c'est ainsi que cela s'est passé. Et, de manière puérile, que disent-ils ? Si nous gardions l'église, cela coûterait cher, et cela coûtera cher, et cela coûtera cher. Tout le monde avait suffisamment peur pour voter pour eux. Puis le conseil est venu et a détruit l'église* ».

¹²⁷¹ See interview with by Ryan Lux, Reynald Girard, September 17, 2020, 24:57 mins., original: « *Moi, et j'ai même dû aller chercher la moitié. Mais malgré tout, nous avons réussi à en sortir une bonne partie* ».

Lajoie was right to expect the worst because the new council's first act of business, on November 11, 2017, was "to repeal all the resolutions that had been passed during the year to complete the controversial project, and to decree the closure of the building at the end of the discussion"¹²⁷². On New Year's Eve 2017, the church was locked without celebrating its last Mass or finding alternative spaces for its community organisations¹²⁷³. With the interior off limits, the new council meanwhile wasted no time semiotically demonstrating its intentions on the church's exterior. Letendre said it was difficult to look at.

I had the impression that there were people who wanted a certain situation, I don't know. It was as if the devil was in the cabin. It seemed for them the church was almost diabolical. Sure, there were some bricks that were a little chipped, but they went overboard, they put up the barricades, it was frightening. They said it was dangerous for our children¹²⁷⁴.

Moving forward, Corriveau was tight-lipped about his plans for the municipally owned church, especially after he learned that he would not be able to use the excise tax, secured to complete the church renovations, to build the brand-new community centre he had promised the young Newcomer families who elected him¹²⁷⁵. Paradis described Corriveau's governance style as evasive with respect to the church. It seemed unlikely that he would sell the land which sat between

¹²⁷² See interview with Aliette Lajoie by Ryan Lux, September 15, 2020, 23 :15 mins., original: « *Et dès la toute première réunion, le 11 novembre 2017, ils ont abrogé toutes les résolutions qui avaient été adoptées au cours de l'année pour mener à bien ces célèbres travaux, et ils ont décrété la fermeture du bâtiment à l'issue de la discussion* ».

¹²⁷³ *Idem.*, 20:00 mins., original: « *À cette époque, le 31 décembre 2017, tout était fermé, avec des clés sur toutes les portes et aucun accès possible. Aucune des organisations communautaires qui avaient accès ne pouvaient s'y rendre* ».

¹²⁷⁴ See interview with Ginette Letendre by Ryan Lux, September 18, 2020, 14:15 mins., original: « *J'ai eu l'impression que certaines personnes souhaitaient une certaine situation, je ne sais pas, c'était comme si le diable était dans la cabane, on aurait dit que pour eux, l'église était presque diabolique. Bien sûr, il y avait quelques briques un peu ébréchées, mais ils sont allés trop loin, ils ont érigé de grandes barricades, c'était effrayant. Ils ont dit que c'était dangereux pour nos enfants* ».

¹²⁷⁵ See interview with Abbé Gilles Dubois by Ryan Lux, September 14, 2020, 7:27 mins., original: « *Le maire s'est dit : « Maintenant, nous avons 250 000 dollars, plus ce que nous avons prévu d'emprunter, nous allons donc créer un nouvel centre communautaire, comme je l'avais promis. » Une fois que tout a été discuté et qu'un plan a été établi, ils nous ont dit : 'Vous ne pouvez plus percevoir la taxe d'accise, sauf si c'est pour le projet que vous aviez initialement proposé ' ».*

the former rectory, recreation centre, and playground. Moreover, it would not have been out of the question for him to pragmatically make an about-face on some kind of future use of the church of his own design. For a little over a year, pro-conservation residents waited uneasily to receive answers regarding the church, knowing full well that its fate lay entirely in Corriveau's hands¹²⁷⁶.

Corriveau's new monopoly on the church's destiny was an unintended consequence of the former council's insistence on pushing through the sale in the hopes of being able to bring their project to term. Had they agreed to heed the consultation, ironically, the church might still be standing under parish ownership. After the disappointing election, many of the transformation committee members shifted their energies to planning the parish and village's centennial celebrations to be held in 2018. Their inability to incorporate the church in the festivities, in addition to having very little to celebrate meant that, besides a commemorative panel displayed inside the village office and a small ceremony, the auspicious anniversary was not the triumph that Lajoie and Letendre had hoped for¹²⁷⁷. In a last-ditch attempt, the Golden Age Club, composed of Old Stock residents, offered to purchase the church for \$1 and assume its maintenance, but the municipality refused.

I think we did what we could, yes. We hoped until the last minute, but it wasn't enough. Why wasn't it enough? I don't know why. What was missing? I don't

¹²⁷⁶ *Idem.*, 34:59 mins., original: « On posait des questions, on lui posait des questions. Ils n'ont jamais répondu correctement des questions. Ouais bon, on n'a pas eu la réponse ».

¹²⁷⁷ See interview with Aliette Lajoie by Ryan Lux, September 15, 2020, 27:05 mins., original: « Ainsi, avec le partenaire de campagne qui s'était présenté avec moi aux élections, et qui n'avait pas été élu non plus, nous avons formé un comité pour le 100^e anniversaire. À l'entrée, juste après avoir tourné dans la salle d'attente principale, il y avait une affiche que nous avons réalisée pour célébrer le 100^e anniversaire. Nous disposions d'un peu d'argent, et nous avons clôturé le projet le 31 décembre 2017. Nous sommes sortis et nous l'avons fait. Nous avons commencé au printemps, nous avons prévu quelque chose autour de Pâques, de la fête des mères, du 10 juin, de la fête des pères pendant l'été, en septembre, le grand barbecue sous le chapiteau comme promotion. Et soudain, nous ne savions plus rien. Et nous avons dû continuer en 2018 parce que j'avais le temps pour l'anniversaire de la municipalité. Elle a été constituée en 1918. Donc, en 2018, nous avons prévu d'organiser ces célébrations sur deux ans ».

know. It would have taken an even stronger leader or something outside the box¹²⁷⁸.

On a bitterly cold day in mid-February 2019, residents on both sides of the conflict gathered to witness the church of Saint-Edmond's demise.

4. *The Fall of Saint-Edmond's: Reactions to Demolition*

Aliette Lajoie could not avoid the scene, even if she wanted to. She lived on the same street and watched as heavy equipment gathered to tear down the 100-year-old church – “it was awful”¹²⁷⁹. Before a small crowd, the machines set to work but Saint-Edmond's resisted. Paradis wryly observed that when “they used to touch the wall at the back. They would say it moved. Then, when they tried to dismantle it, one shovel couldn't pull it off the foundation, it took two, one couldn't do it alone”¹²⁸⁰. Abbé Dubois remembered feeling vindicated by the same vignette. “What surprised them was that the demolishers had such trouble demolishing the back wall”¹²⁸¹. Lajoie remembered watching Mayor Corriveau on television, elated, speaking with reporters in front of the wrecked church. His tone underscored her conviction and despair that the demolition could not be explained simply by religious decline, but rather it seemed to be a question of dominance and

¹²⁷⁸ See interview with Ginette Letendre by Ryan Lux, September 18, 2020, 1:13:06 mins., original: « *Je pense que nous avons fait de notre mieux, oui. Nous avons espéré jusqu'à la dernière minute, mais cela n'a pas suffi. Pourquoi ? Je ne sais pas. Que manquait-il ? Peut-être aurait-il fallu un leader encore plus fort ou quelque chose qui sorte des sentiers battus* ».

¹²⁷⁹ See interview with Aliette Lajoie by Ryan Lux, September 15, 2020, 36:29 mins., original: « *Et moi, je l'ai vu de chez moi, parce que j'habite la rue de l'église. C'était vraiment affreux* ».

¹²⁸⁰ See interview with Jean-Claude Paradis by Ryan Lux, September 15, 2020, 16:15 mins., original: « *Avant, ils ont touché le mur derrière et on dit qu'il bougeait. Ensuite, lorsqu'ils ont essayé de le retirer, une seule pelle n'a pas suffi pour le démolir ; il en a fallu deux, et une seule personne n'a pas pu y arriver seule* ».

¹²⁸¹ See interview with Abbé Gilles Dubois by Ryan Lux, September 14, 2020, 10:29 mins., original: « *Oui, mais c'était bien fait et assez solide. Mais ce qui les a surpris, c'est que l'équipe de démolition leur a dit qu'elle avait eu du mal à démolir le mur arrière* ».

rivalry. “It was like, ‘We’re the ones in power and naturally we have the right to decide to do what we want’”¹²⁸².

The circumstances surrounding the demolition raised questions about who stood to benefit as pro-conservationists tried to wrap their heads around their wasted renovation efforts. Letendre, who perhaps spent the most time in the church of all the participants, questioned the mayor’s motivation.

Why did he want to destroy it so absolutely? I still don’t have an answer, apart from a monetary motive. Once again, it depends on your point of view. Because what’s the idea? Saint-Gérard and then Saint-Marjorique were also destroyed. They also destroyed churches, but they had structural problems. That wasn’t the case here. They tried to make us believe that, but it wasn’t true¹²⁸³.

Abbé Dubois explained that Letendre’s feelings mirrored those of other remaining parishioners in Saint-Edmond and that the cheering by some as the church crumbled was taken as proof of the New Arrivals’ profound anti-religiosity¹²⁸⁴.

Michel Côté was also suspicious of what seemed to him like the looting of a grave site. He told me he asked the mayor if he could move the new furnace to Saint-Eugène to replace that church’s oil furnace, but the mayor told him he would have to submit a tender like anyone else. The parish, via donation, had just purchased the brand-new wood pellet furnace for \$35,000 and the

¹²⁸² See interview with Aliette Lajoie by Ryan Lux, September 15, 2020, 38:11 mins., original: « *Il s’agissait principalement de divergences d’opinion et d’une question de rivalité. C’était comme si on disait : ‘C’est nous qui sommes au pouvoir’, donc c’est naturel que nous ayons le droit de décider ce que nous voulons faire* » ».

¹²⁸³ See interview with Ginette Letendre by Ryan Lux, September 18, 2020, 1:03:48 mins., original: « *Pourquoi voulait-il tellement la détruire ? Je n’ai toujours pas de réponse, sauf pour des raisons financières ? Encore une fois, cela dépend de votre point de vue. Car quelle est l’idée ? C’est que Saint-Gérard et Saint-Marjorique ont également été détruits. Ils ont également détruit des églises, mais il y avait des problèmes structurels. Mais ce n’était pas le cas ici. Ils ont essayé de nous faire croire cela, mais ce n’était pas vrai* ».

¹²⁸⁴ See interview with Abbé Gilles Dubois by Ryan Lux, September 14, 2020, 30:29 mins., original: « *Où était-ce le groupe qui était religieux ? Ils ne comprenaient pas non plus l’autre groupe qui applaudissait. On aurait pu considérer cela comme un comportement normal. Mais c’était parce qu’il était antireligieux* ».

municipality sold it for, “\$3000. It's completely ridiculous. As an entity you can give it back to the Parish or you sell it to the Parish for \$1”¹²⁸⁵.

From Lajoie’s perspective, the same kind of mean-spiritedness was manifest in the way the council chose to commemorate the church, as if gloating. She mentioned the large stones, which outlined the former footprint of the church as an example. “Apparently, they came from the foundation, but I have my doubts. They kept the bell, thinking it would console us for having lost the building”¹²⁸⁶. The landscaping did not only offend the Old Stock but also infuriated a good portion of the spending conscious New Arrivals like Girard, but for different reasons.

After the demolition, which cost roughly \$200,000, Girard made a habit of biking past the construction site to observe the ongoing remediation work. He felt betrayed by the group he helped elect to rein in expenses. “These people are all very intelligent individually, but together, they make the wrong decisions. They dared to make changes, they wanted to do the landscaping, and it cost a fortune”¹²⁸⁷. In total the new council spent more than \$400,000 removing the church, distributed among certain pro-development Old Stock contractors, to the outrage of many Newcomers.

¹²⁸⁵ See interview with Michel Côté by Ryan Lux, September 14, 2020, 52:19 mins., original: « *En tant que président, je suis allé voir le maire et lui ai dit : « Je veux récupérer ma chaudière. Je vais l'installer à Saint-Eugène, car là-bas, ils ont le chauffage au mazout. Ce sera beaucoup plus économique d'avoir le chauffage au bois, car ici, tout est déjà en place. Nous avons le chauffage au bois. » Et le maire m'a répondu que ce n'était pas possible, qu'il fallait lancer un appel d'offres et que les acheteurs devaient soumettre leurs offres. Nous avons payé environ 35 000 à 36 000 \$ pour la chaudière et son installation, nous avons lancé un appel d'offres, et si je me souviens bien, ils l'ont vendue pour 3 000 \$. C'est complètement ridicule. En tant que particulier, soit vous la rendez à la fabrique, soit vous la vendez à la fabrique pour 1 \$».*

¹²⁸⁶ See interview with Aliette Lajoie by Ryan Lux, September 15, 2020, 37:26 mins., original: « *Vous avez peut-être remarqué quelques grosses pierres dans l'aménagement paysager que nous avons réalisé sur le site. Apparemment, elles proviennent du sous-sol, mais j'ai des doutes. Ils ont conservé la cloche, pensant que cela nous consolerait de la perte du bâtiment ».*

¹²⁸⁷ See interview with by Ryan Lux, Reynald Girard, September 17, 2020, 18:00 mins., original: « *Ce sont des personnes qui sont toutes très intelligentes individuellement, mais dans l'ensemble, elles prennent les mauvaises décisions. Elles ont osé faire des changements, elles voulaient le faire pour conserver l'église, cela a coûté une fortune ».*

We're currently dealing with a group that's at war, really at war... They're out of touch with reality. The Mayor was a pig farmer. He should have continued to raise pigs because he himself is one, excuse the expression, but he made illegal manoeuvres. He made personal threats¹²⁸⁸.

Girard claims that Corriveau had the Quebec Police warned him not to make trouble and banned him from participating in council proceedings¹²⁸⁹. Far from putting the conflict to rest, demolishing the church only created new and deeper fissures in Saint-Edmond-de-Grantham.

E. Bitter Consequences: Demolition's Social Cost

Whether participants supported the municipal purchase of the church or not, they all agreed that the saga had a destructive impact on Saint-Edmond-de-Grantham by destroying community spirit, limiting instances of sociability, discouraging political participation, and by accelerating the loss of local institutions. Together these processes have left the village a husk of its former self.

1. *Loss of Community*

"It killed community spirit"¹²⁹⁰, Aliette Lajoie lamented as she recalled how Saint-Edmond-de-Grantham was before the question of the church split the community in two. There used to be monthly dances, each local organisation would take turns hosting community fundraising meals, which regularly exceeded venue capacity. "It died out slowly. Perhaps it's not surprising that it's come to this. Lack of interest. Is it important for young families? I don't know. It's almost like a

¹²⁸⁸ *Idem.*, 19:00 mins., original: « Nous sommes actuellement un groupe en guerre, véritablement en guerre. Ils sont déconnectés de la réalité. Monsieur le maire, il était éleveur de porcs, il devrait continuer à élever des porcs, car il en est un lui-même, excusez l'expression, mais il s'est livré à des manœuvres illégales. Il a proféré des menaces personnelles ».

¹²⁸⁹ *Idem.*, 21:00 mins., original: « Il a également fait appel à la SQ parce que nous surveillons les travaux, affirmant que cela ne nous regardait pas et que les conseillers municipaux actuels ne comprenaient pas que l'argent qu'il dépensait était l'argent de tout le monde ».

¹²⁹⁰ See interview with Aliette Lajoie by Ryan Lux, September 15, 2020, 20:54 mins., original: « Je pense que ça a tué beaucoup l'esprit communautaire ».

bedroom community now”¹²⁹¹. When it was still standing and open to the public, Jean-Claude Paradis explained that the church, after its transformation into a community centre, served as a regular spot to meet others, especially for pickle ball, which was wildly popular. “We don't see each other anymore. Before you could know who would be there at what hour. ... But that's over. Yes, it's over. Sometimes you need a neutral place to have friendships”¹²⁹².

From his vantage point at the bishop's palace, Mgr. Simon Héroux was not optimistic about the community's ability to heal its wounds any time soon. “It was very painful to see everything that happened. It was a long way from the gospel. I lived within this context of heartbreak and bickering. This community will be broken for decades and decades”¹²⁹³. Seven years of intense and intimate conflict have had a scorched earth effect, and everyone agreed that it consumed all the village's considerable community-driven energies.

2. *De-politicisation*

Saint-Edmond's church scandal ruined countless reputations and friendships, but it also delegitimised the very quality fundamental to its existence – namely its political character. Toxic discourse, threats in the form of business relationships, and unreconcilable demographic divisions

¹²⁹¹ *Idem.*, 49:34 mins., original: « Il y avait des réunions et des fêtes le samedi, des bals une fois par mois et des dîners communautaires. Chaque organisation organisait son propre dîner pour collecter des fonds. Il y en avait trop. Parfois, il y avait plus de 100 personnes, ce qui était la limite pour cette salle. Mais il y avait vraiment beaucoup de monde impliqué. Oui, il y avait aussi une activité avec le pèlerinage. Elle était très populaire. Et les gens de... Cela disparaît peu à peu. Ce n'est peut-être pas surprenant que nous en soyons arrivés là. Le manque d'intérêt. Est-ce important pour les jeunes familles ? Je ne sais pas. C'est presque devenu un village dortoir ».

¹²⁹² See interview with Jean-Claude Paradis by Ryan Lux, September 15, 2020, mins. 56:13, original: « Tout cela a pour conséquence la destruction de l'église. Ensuite, la communauté, nous ne nous voyons plus. Si, nous avons du pickleball. Vous pouvez dire à quelle heure vous serez là, vous savez. Ma femme aimait bien cet endroit, son amie qui vit dans le village, elles aimaient bien. Mais c'est fini maintenant. Oui, c'est fini. Parfois, il faut un endroit neutre pour les amitiés ».

¹²⁹³ See interview with Mgr. Simon Héroux by Ryan Lux, September 17, 2020, 36:50mins., original: « Le groupe de Saint-Edmond, si vous voulez bien, c'était très douloureux de voir tout ce qui se passait. J'y allais, c'était loin d'être évangélique. Mais je vivais dans ce contexte de conflits et de querelles. Mais cette communauté est brisée depuis des décennies et des décennies ».

have perhaps irreparably damaged the democratic foundations of its political life. Aliette Lajoie blamed rivalries and the bitterness they engendered for ruining village politics.

The people who used to come to the council to protest us, well, they're the ones who have once again become the opponents, but there aren't many people left who go to the meetings, who get involved in this. The others in power can do what they want now¹²⁹⁴.

What is more is that since the church's demolition and the *de facto* disappearance of nearly every community group, Lajoie told me there really is not much reason for residents to become politically involved. She doubted any of the once extremely active Old Stock group would bother standing in the next election because there "is nothing left to govern"¹²⁹⁵.

Much like his political opponents who fought to save the church, Girard said that he and residents like him who initially supported Mayor Corriveau, felt completely politically powerless, partially because of the administration's unprecedented secrecy¹²⁹⁶. As Quebec downloads more and more responsibilities to municipalities, Girard questioned whether Saint-Edmond was even capable of governing itself and joined others in speculating that the inevitable result would be amalgamation with Saint-Germain¹²⁹⁷.

¹²⁹⁴ See interview with Aliette Lajoie by Ryan Lux, September 15, 2020, 44:19 mins., original: « Ici, tout est question de politique. De rivalité. Et cela crée de l'amertume. Il y a donc maintenant une sorte de division. Les personnes qui avaient l'habitude d'assister aux réunions du conseil sont désormais celles qui forment l'opposition. Peu de gens assistent encore aux réunions ou s'impliquent dans ce domaine. Ils font désormais ce qu'ils veulent ».

¹²⁹⁵ *Idem.*, 41:50 mins., original: « J'hésite vraiment parce que j'en garde encore de la rancœur. Oui, c'est certain, et ce n'est pas naturel. Mais en même temps, nous nous sommes dit que nous payons des impôts. Mais nous n'aimons pas ça. Je ne sais pas ce qui va se passer l'année prochaine, lors des élections de 2021. Que va-t-il se passer ? Nous avons pensé que le groupe qui était pour l'église n'en fait pas partie, donc ils se présenteront dans l'arène parce qu'il n'y a plus rien à gérer dans la municipalité ».

¹²⁹⁶ See interview with by Ryan Lux, Reynald Girard, September 17, 2020, 22 :12 mins., original: « Il n'aime pas l'information publique, il en donne le moins possible et il ment à la population à propos de certaines choses. Il n'aime pas la vérité, Monsieur le Maire ».

¹²⁹⁷ *Idem.*, 7:59 mins., original: « En fait, il est actuellement question de fermer la municipalité et de l'annexer à une autre. Nous n'avons plus les moyens, car le gouvernement confie beaucoup de responsabilités aux régions et aux petites municipalités, mais il ne leur donne pas les moyens financiers nécessaires pour les assumer. Les impôts augmentent donc, et nous n'avons plus de contribuables ».

3. *De-institutionalisation*

Perhaps even more worrying than what could, after all, be a fleeting de-politicisation was the steady march of de-institutionalisation sapping the community's capacity to overcome its darkest period. Though the process of de-institutionalisation had been underway since the 1960s with the loss of Saint-Edmond-de-Grantham's schools, the loss of its church as a community space has arguably been the most keenly felt and has had cascading effects on the village's ability to institutionalise at all. Not having space to gather large crowds most notably affected the municipality's ability to continue its tradition of large gatherings open to the whole population. Jean-Claude Paradis cited, for example, the annual children's Christmas party, which in 2018 had to be hosted in the small recreation hall with a capacity of only 60 people. He explained that half of the revellers had to wait outside and watch the festivities on screens while they waited their turn to see Santa Claus¹²⁹⁸.

Besides, no longer having a building capable of hosting the majority of residents, as was the norm until the wave of Newcomers arrived, the closure affected the village centre as a natural hub for social interaction in two ways. First there were fewer reasons to go there, and secondly, fears of reprisals over the conflict made church supporters feel unwelcome. Soon after the church closed at the end of 2017, before the 2018 New Year's Day Mass, members of the anti-church conservation clan had, according to Aliette Lajoie, began an informal boycott of the *dépanneur* located across the street from the church, leading to its closure, along with the local postal service it offered. "So apparently the opponents had already started boycotting the convenience store

¹²⁹⁸ See interview with Jean-Claude Paradis by Ryan Lux, September 15, 2020, 15:90 mins., original: « *Non, ça n'avait pas de sens, quand ils ont organisé la fête de Noël. Oui, pour les enfants. Oui, tout le monde était là, la moitié d'entre eux étaient dehors. Soixante personnes maximums à l'étage. Parce que c'est une fête pour les enfants. Il y avait trop de monde, alors ils ont engagé des surveillants pour s'occuper des personnes à l'extérieur. La moitié d'entre eux sont montés à l'étage, il y en avait un, deux, trois, jusqu'à 7 heures du matin. Ensuite, ils ont dû sortir pour que les autres puissent entrer. L'église pouvait alors accueillir 300 personnes* ».

because the shopkeeper was a former member of the parish council”¹²⁹⁹. But Lajoie explained that the caprice did not limit itself to informal shunning but extended to punishing some of the only remaining formal organisations.

Yes, they associated organisations that were pro-conservation of the church. So, the Environment Committee was boycotted, that's all. And it went beyond that. In 2018, the organisation didn't receive the usual municipal subsidy, nor in 2019, and that's why we closed it¹³⁰⁰.

Paradis' neighbourhood security committee met with much the same fate¹³⁰¹. Reflecting on her work with the various disbanded committees, Lajoie could not help admitting a certain amount of defeat. “It's sad when you have worked so hard and all the organisations there have disappeared. I saw the beautiful work overturned. Because there was no possibility of negotiating anything with them”¹³⁰². Mgr. Simon Héroux said that what has happened in Saint-Edmond-de-Grantham should serve as a cautionary tale of what can happen if inevitable future closures are not handled carefully.

What's happening is the gradual removal of the soul of a parish. These villages are emptied of their institutions. And then, at some point, it's the church's turn. In Quebec, villages were built around the church. The church is still at the heart of the village¹³⁰³.

¹²⁹⁹ See interview with Aliette Lajoie by Ryan Lux, September 15, 2020, 39 :35 mins., original: « *Mais bon, d'accord. Apparemment, les opposants avaient déjà commencé à boycotter le magasin de proximité, parce que le commerçant était un ancien membre de la Fabrique* ».

¹³⁰⁰ *Idem.*, 1:10:54 mins., original: « *Oui, nous avons collaboré avec des organisations qui étaient favorables à la conservation de l'église. Elles nous ont donc boycottés, c'est tout. Et cela est allé plus loin. En 2018, l'organisation environnementale n'a pas reçu sa subvention municipale habituelle, ni en 2019, c'est pourquoi nous l'avons fermée. Elle était devenue une idée qui les mettait mal à l'aise* ».

¹³⁰¹ See interview with Jean-Claude Paradis by Ryan Lux, September 15, 2020, 38:53 mins., original: « *Il n'y a plus de comité de sécurité qui se réunissait tous les mois. Je faisais partie de ce comité, mais il n'existe plus* ».

¹³⁰² See interview with Aliette Lajoie by Ryan Lux, September 15, 2020, 40:39 mins., original: « *C'est triste. C'est triste, quand on a tant de travail à faire et que toutes les organisations ont disparu. J'ai vu ce beau travail détruit. J'ai fermé le comité environnemental. Parce qu'il n'y avait aucune possibilité de négocier quoi que ce soit avec eux sur d'autres questions* ».

¹³⁰³ See interview with Mgr Simon Héroux by Ryan Lux, September 17, 2020, 43:48 mins., original: « *Ce qui se passe, c'est la disparition progressive de l'âme d'une paroisse. Ces villages sont vidés de leurs institutions. Et puis, à un moment donné, ce sera le tour de l'église. Au Québec, les villages ont été construits autour de l'église. L'église est toujours située au cœur du village* ».

Thus, the Old Stock agreed that Saint-Edmond-de-Grantham was a healthier community when its steeple still held forth over the tiny agglomeration. However, that consensus could be deceiving as one of the greatest obstacles I encountered when conducting my field work in Saint-Edmond was to glean diverse perspectives from the winning group, for example: Mayor Corriveau, real estate developer Manon Rodier, or letter writer Huguette Alie-Désilets.

F. Aberrant or Axiological? A typological gaze

Part of what makes analysing Saint-Edmond-de-Grantham's experience of church closure difficult to generalise was its minuscule scale. One must ask themselves how contingent events were on particular personalities, relationships, or events, as opposed to their evocation of broader social forces, such as social closure, secularisation, privatisation of a public Church and religious displacements to evolving conceptions of the intersections of religious heritage and identity – processes which are perhaps more obvious in cases marked by major religious or national heritage dimensions, like Saint-Germain-de-Rimouski or Saint-Jean-Baptiste in Québec City. After all, Saint-Edmond-de-Grantham was one of hundreds of similar country churches which cover Québec's agricultural landscape facing transition and its only remarkable characteristic was the sensational manner which it resisted against and eventually succumbed to its annihilation. But as with the other cases, I contend that examining Saint-Edmond-de-Grantham's singularly explosive closure can pull the veil off the forces at play in rural church closures where public consensus may mask very real concerns, such as changing demographics' impact on local commitment to heritage, limited financial capacity, and the complicated nature of mounting social projects in an ever individualising, mobile, and virtual world. This final section will discuss how the typologies previously discussed apply to Saint-Edmond-de-Grantham. To reiterate, these six fall into three domains, in sets of polarised pairs: religion (1. traditional vs. 2, modernist), civil society (3,

grassroots vs. 4, institutional), and politics (5, open secular vs. 6, strict secular). Ultimately, as with other cases, these six types coalesce in two federated groups of individuals who either support or oppose church conservation. However, in Saint-Edmond, there was no debate over how the church would be conserved, but rather; it was a conflict fought over whether it should exist at all. Parish Council President Michel Côté admitted to being stunned by how events transpired. “Saint-Edmond’s, let’s say for example, took a left, when the overwhelming tendency in Quebec was to go right, to recycle village churches, not demolish them.”¹³⁰⁴

What is interesting about Saint-Edmond’s results are the way in which they are directly inverted in the religious and civil society spheres compared to those observed in Rimouski and Quebec City – results in the political domain are more consistent, although, unlike in the larger centres, it was strict secularists that won the day in the end in Saint-Edmond. The obvious question is: why, in this case, did the populism in support of religious heritage that saved Saint-Germain-de-Rimouski and Saint-Jean-Baptiste veer in the opposite course in Saint-Edmond-de-Grantham?

1. Religious Domain

Though I suggested above that Saint-Edmond’s religious decline followed the usual path of losing its resident priest and fusion with a neighbouring parish, its journey to closure is distinguished by the fact that its religious offering was not ceased by its parish council or diocese, but rather by the municipality’s decision to bar entry to the church and demolish it. It is possible that, had the pandemic not forced the prohibition of religious services, that Mass would still be offered to this day in the municipal recreation hall, or what Abbé Dubois called the “little box”.

¹³⁰⁴ See interview with Michel Côté by Ryan Lux, September 14, 2020, 1:08:49 mins., original: « *Mais nous avons brièvement abordé ce sujet plus tôt dans une autre question, en disant que Saint-Edmond est complètement à gauche, alors que la province est à droite. La tendance est de dire que nous allons recycler nos églises* ».

What is even more remarkable was that the Parish and clergy were dominated by 1), a modern Catholic ethos and that the clergy was still willing to offer Mass for the handful of Saint-Edmondois that continued to regularly attend, whereas, in other cases, even a few hundred regulars were not enough to justify clerical resources indefinitely. Abbé Dubois explained that he and the diocese were prepared to follow the parish council's wishes for the church and were pleased to accommodate their

desire to keep a place for worship in Saint-Edmond-de-Grantham - that was the initial idea. In fact, in the first talks we had, parishioners went to see the bishop to petition him. It was important for them to celebrate and for us to support them in their personal journey. They needed to see that we were there too. That's a very strong link, and that's why, in the various discussions and with the municipality, the plan was always to keep the link, which ended up in the small box, but the link was still there¹³⁰⁵.

Another difference between Saint-Edmond's closure was the passive role played by the clergy and regularly practising Catholics in the polemic. Abbé Dubois said that neither he nor the Parish Council had any interest in sullyng themselves by engaging in mudslinging, even if they were directly impacted by the outcome of the dispute.

It was difficult to go through it. And even here, at our parish, we said one thing to ourselves, "complaints that come our way, or bad things that are said against us. We keep quiet and we don't talk about it". Out of charity for those who have gone before. If we had wanted to start tearing them down publicly, that wouldn't have been right"¹³⁰⁶.

¹³⁰⁵ See interview with Abbé Gilles Dubois by Ryan Lux, September 14, 2020, 1:09:50 mins., original: « *Mais comme je l'ai expliqué déjà, il y avait une volonté de conserver un lieu de culte à Saint-Edmond. C'était l'idée initiale. En fait, lors des premières discussions que nous avons eues, ils sont allés voir l'évêque pour l'informer. Oui, l'évêque. Il était là au nom de la communauté qui souhaite toujours prier, et il est important de célébrer pour eux et de les soutenir dans leur cheminement personnel. Mais ils ont besoin de voir que nous sommes là aussi. C'est un lien très fort, et c'est pourquoi, lors des différentes discussions que nous avons eues avec la municipalité, il a toujours été question de maintenir ce lien, qui s'est finalement traduit par une petite boîte, mais le lien était toujours là* ».

¹³⁰⁶ *Idem.*, 11:03 mins., original: « *C'était une saga, vous voyez ? Si c'est bien ce que c'était. C'était difficile à vivre. Puis, même ici, au conseil paroissial, nous nous sommes dit une chose. Les plaintes qui nous parviennent ou les*

Likewise, on the parish level, there was a willingness by most of the remaining regular practising Catholics to continue practising at similar rates at different venues, whether at the recreation hall or the other churches in the parish. Ginette Letendre explained that hope and genuine faith discouraged her small group from getting caught up in the drama and that as a result, healing has been easier for the faith community¹³⁰⁷.

Because Saint-Edmond's practising Catholics were not polarised between traditional and modernist camps, their conception of religious heritage incorporated a dual concern. On the one hand, they prioritised their community of faith as the most important heritage to conserve. On the other, Abbé Dubois acknowledged the important religious role of historically sacred spaces. He explained that, ideally, the two visions should be mutually reinforcing.

The most important religious heritage is what we experience internally, what we celebrate, and so we hold on to that, so we don't lose it. The second is the more human and physical side, the buildings. They are defined as a heritage that we should try as far as possible to preserve and I think that for some people my age, churches represent the lived experience of a population to some extent. Many people attach themselves to them. When I was young, I remember one of the neighbours' houses burned down and the first thing he did was to go and see the priest and at Mass the priest announced what had happened, and we all helped to rebuild it. The church was like an anchor for getting things done¹³⁰⁸.

mauvaises choses qui sont dites à notre sujet. Nous gardons le silence et n'en parlons pas. Par charité pour les personnes qui sont décédées. Si elles avaient voulu commencer à nous démolir publiquement, cela n'aurait pas été juste ».

¹³⁰⁷ See interview with Ginette Letendre by Ryan Lux, September 18, 2020, 51:35 mins., original: « Parfois, nous nous disons que peut-être les choses ne vont pas si mal actuellement, mais nous affirmons que si nous continuons à aller à la messe, nous irons à la messe à Saint-Germain ou ailleurs. Mais il faut vraiment être croyant »

¹³⁰⁸ See interview with Abbé Gilles Dubois by Ryan Lux, September 14, 2020, 59:09 mins., original: « Le patrimoine religieux le plus important est celui que nous vivons intérieurement, celui que nous célébrons, et c'est pourquoi nous nous y accrochons pour ne pas le perdre. Le deuxième aspect est plus humain et physique, il s'agit des bâtiments. Ils sont définis comme un patrimoine que nous devons essayer de préserver autant que possible. Et je pense que pour certaines personnes de mon âge, les églises représentent l'expérience vécue d'une population quelque part. Beaucoup de gens ressentent un lien physique avec elles. Même quand j'étais jeune, je me souviens d'un de mes voisins qui était mort dans un incendie. Nous sommes allés voir le prêtre, qui en a parlé pendant la messe, puis nous sommes allés la reconstruire. C'était comme une ancre pour retrouver des choses ».

Vicar General Mgr. Simon Héroux held a similarly balanced view of religious heritage. Reflecting on his personal attachment to his childhood parish, Mgr. Héroux explained that he understood how people can be attached, even to admittedly banal churches.

Of course, Saint-Edmond's didn't have much heritage value. But still, for the people of this parish, it was very important because it was where they lived. There are a lot of memories in it. Their ancestors built it, so it's a bit like losing a link with a bygone age¹³⁰⁹.

The corollary to the first type - clergy and modernist Catholics – 2), traditional practising Catholic type, identified in the previous two cases, who attach stronger value to the antiquity and aesthetic qualities of their churches than they do the community they worship with, is not applicable to Saint-Edmond's case, which is revelatory of the second type itself. Because Saint-Edmond's closure was not a zero-sum contest between two churches, practising Catholics' preference in style and attachments did not enter the equation, as the simple country church was the only game in town.

2. *Civil Society Domain*

Where the dichotomy, modern vs. traditional, does come into play, however, is in the way it influenced how populist forces – type three, 3), grassroots civil society – rejected Saint-Edmond's for its perceived lack of religious heritage value. While the red-brick church was old, extensive renovations in the 1980s gave it a Vatican II style interior, and even the pro-church committee did not seek heritage status for the building. Grassroots civil society participants like Reynald Girard

¹³⁰⁹ See interview with Mgr. Simon Héroux by Ryan Lux, September 17, 2020, 54:47 mins., original: « *Bien sûr, l'église Saint-Edmond avait une grande valeur patrimoniale. Mais pour les habitants de cette paroisse, elle était très importante parce que c'était là qu'ils vivaient. Oui, et elle renferme beaucoup de souvenirs. Nos ancêtres l'ont construite, c'est donc un peu comme perdre un lien avec une époque révolue* ».

dismissed the church's architecture and history as unimportant. While some members of the anti-church clan were described by Abbé Dubois as "anti-religious"¹³¹⁰, Girard was not among them. He told me that he considers himself to be a believer, though he rarely practises, and that he appreciates 'deserving' religious heritage. He said that, on the number of occasions he has visited Europe, he always made a point to visit architecturally important and historically significant churches – qualities Girard would attribute to Saint-Edmond's.

I love old churches. I like them a lot. But this was a cardboard church without character, which was much too big. If you read its history, when they built this church, there was already bickering. Nobody wanted to pay, and people were forced to pay anyways. There was already blackmail when the church was built. There was a bad start. There was exactly no reason to build a church here in the first place¹³¹¹.

So, it seems that there is a link between populist sensibilities towards religious heritage and traditional Catholic aesthetics and spirituality, both tending towards the valorisation of triumphant grandeur and glorious historical associations. In this way the orientation of grassroots civil society action is less inverted than it initially seemed compared to the previous two cases. The difference with Saint-Edmond's is that unlike Saint-Germain-de-Rimouski with its ecclesiastical prestige or Saint-Jean-Baptiste endowed with its nationally significant architecture, Saint-Edmond's had no redeeming qualities to justify its expense to a *large enough* group willing to pay.

¹³¹⁰ There were of course members of Girard's anti-church transformation group who opposed the municipal sale based on secularist principles by instrumentalising anti-religious feeling, however, none of them spoke with me and their grievances have already been addressed in the previous chapter. Moreover, their perspective's lack of nuance does not require much attention to understand. Furthermore, this perspective's role played a far smaller role than did conceptions of religious heritage and social divisions.

¹³¹¹ See interview with by Ryan Lux, Reynald Girard, September 17, 2020, 32:54 mins., original: « *J'adore voyager. Nous avons voyagé plusieurs fois en Europe. Nous aimons les vieilles églises. Nous les aimons beaucoup. Mais ici, c'est une église en carton qui n'avait aucun caractère, qui était beaucoup trop grande. Si vous lisez l'histoire, quand ils ont construit cette église, il y avait déjà des querelles, personne ne voulait payer, et les gens ont été obligés de payer. Il y avait déjà du chantage pendant la construction. C'était un mauvais départ, mais c'est exactement ça. Il n'y avait aucune raison de construire une église. Point* ».

The grassroots group, as they often are, was an amalgam of various interests: pro-development actors, fiscal conservatives, and Newcomers with no real attachment to the church, “it was a real mix. But in general, it was people who were maybe fifteen or twenty years younger than the cohort who wanted to keep the church at all costs”¹³¹². Interestingly, as evidenced by the post-demolition schism, the grassroots movement’s base did not share their Old Stock leaders’ single-minded obsession with demolition¹³¹³. For actors like Robert Corriveau and real estate developers, the church’s demolition did not seem to have been mostly about saving municipal money. Instead, personal interests such as financial gain and rivalry over local prestige appear to have been the principal motivation. However diverse their aims, they had enough in common to form a coalition, which formed a significant majority, whose members had no habit of using the church and little interest in beginning to. Girard described the project to transform the church as serving the interests of only “a small group of people paid for by raising everyone’s taxes. It would create an endless money pit, and, in the end, it would have been demolished in the same way, just several years later”¹³¹⁴. But for the large minority group of people who did use the church, it was cherished as a remarkable collective project dedicated to a place they had a personal attachment to it and though they were outnumbered, they were influential.

The idea for the municipality to purchase the church had been in the ether for a long time before the local government officially leased the church in 2014. Parish council president Michel Côté

¹³¹² *Idem.*, 13:24 mins., original: « Il y avait des gens qui venaient de l’extérieur de la région. Il y avait des gens qui étaient nés et avaient grandi ici, à Saint-Edmond. C’était un vrai mélange. Mais en général, c’étaient des gens qui avaient peut-être quinze ou vingt ans de moins que le reste de la congrégation, qui voulaient à tout prix garder l’église ouverte ».

¹³¹³ See interview with by Ryan Lux, Reynald Girard, September 17, 2020, 30:13 mins., original: « La meilleure chose qui aurait pu arriver, c’est que l’usine continue à être propriétaire de l’église et qu’elle ne soit pas démolie. Le montant minimum qui pourrait être investi pour la faire durer peut-être quinze ans, voire vingt ans s’il avait été prouvé qu’il n’y avait aucun risque pour la sécurité, tel que l’effondrement de la maçonnerie qui l’entoure ».

¹³¹⁴ *Idem.*, 31:32 mins., original: « Que cela ne sert personne ou seulement un petit groupe de personnes. Et puis, que nos impôts augmenteraient et que cela deviendrait un gouffre financier, et qu’au final, cela serait démoli de toute façon, mais plusieurs années plus tard ».

said the notion had been discussed among local leaders since 2005, however, the practice of co-responsibility of church space between local governments and parishes had not yet become generally popular as it would later across Quebec ¹³¹⁵. But as time marched on, leaders of community organisations, pillars of 4), institutional civil society, like Lajoie, Paradis, and parish leaders such as Letendre, Côté, and Abbé Dubois assumed an eventual transfer from parish to municipal responsibility as a matter of course. Just as the Parish maintained the church on behalf of the municipality, the return of the favour was taken for granted regarding any future arrangement. The plan, unveiled in 2013, enjoyed widespread support from the most active community members who belonged to the Parish, the Golden Age Club, as well as the Recreation, Safety, and the Environment Committees. Notably, each of these groups had affiliations with at least one member of the council. Saint-Edmond was simply not big enough for the political and institutional civil society social spheres to be autonomous and differentiated.

In other words, virtually everyone who participated in community life, in some way, positively viewed, and, for the most part, was involved in, the plan to purchase and transform the church, for both practical reasons, and for its heritage signification. Together, they were able to draw on their collective experience of navigating Quebec's grant-awarding bureaucracy and local community organisations, so they were confident that they could pass the church onto the subsequent generation. Pro-church committee members were doubly confident of the virtue of their project; not only would it provide a community venue, but it would conserve the village's original character, constantly menaced by changing demographics. "The part of the population that came

¹³¹⁵ See interview with Michel Côté by Ryan Lux, September 14, 2020, 12:55 mins., original: « *Entre 2005 et 2013, pour toutes sortes de raisons qui ne sont pas vraiment pertinentes pour votre recherche, le conseil paroissial et la municipalité ne sont jamais parvenus à s'entendre sur la formulation d'un bail, aussi simple et banal que cela puisse paraître* ».

from Saint-Edmond wanted to keep this symbol and they were ready for this transformation so that it would remain standing¹³¹⁶”.

Lajoie recalled the utter incomprehension experienced by Old Stock residents when grassroots opposition emerged. They had all assumed they were acting in the best interests of the community and could not have fathomed to what degree their neighbours would oppose something they considered to be a collective good. Their project simultaneously protected community space, religious heritage, and an iconic local symbol. “Heritage is a counterweight and that's what it should be. But maybe for my generation, it's important. But for the other generations that come after?” mused Lajoie¹³¹⁷. Saint-Edmond’s ‘establishment’ was blindsided by the rejection of their worldview. In addition to wasted energies, the Old Stock’s central sense of belonging in the community was shaken to its core. Working on the church brought parishioners, community leaders, and the municipality together in an invigorating collaboration, which energised the Old Stock segment of the community and inspired them to look forward to the future, which only compounded the shock when their work was so energetically rejected. Letendre remembered feeling comforted that the notion of religious heritage had united the community around a single project dedicated to continuity. Letendre explained that,

[I]t's true that in our group, there were people who were more interested in heritage than in religious significance as such, but it's still important to recognise the existence of people who worked enormously towards a collective goal. These were people who wanted a place to come together. Before it was God, now it's the community, it's not that different. We're all part of the same family, if you like. Basically, it was our ancestors who built this place, and now it was our turn.

¹³¹⁶ See interview with Aliette Lajoie by Ryan Lux, September 15, 2020, 47:56 mins., original: « *La partie de la population originaire de Saint-Edmond souhaitait préserver ce symbole et était prête à accepter cette transformation, afin qu'il puisse rester debout* ».

¹³¹⁷ *Idem.*, 56:34 mins., original: « *Le patrimoine est un contrepoids, et c'est très bien ainsi. Mais peut-être est-ce important pour ma génération. Mais qu'en est-il des générations qui nous succéderont ?* ».

That's important. You must know where you come from. It's where we come from¹³¹⁸.

Given such a porous barrier between civil society and politics in Saint-Edmond, readers will notice that there is no distinction between institutional civil society and open secularist political values and priorities, as they are essentially coextensive. While the Newcomer clan were happy to let the Old Stock run the community, they did not feel called on to implement institutional civil society's priorities. Conversely, the municipality benefited from a robust institutionalised civil society in the sense that it was able to devolve many typical municipal responsibilities to its committees run by energetic volunteers – producing a dynamic where distinctions between the two spheres were largely artificial, given that village politics were essentially an expression of civil society in that they are basically volunteers. Once the political consensus disappeared, in essence, there were two civil societies with political agendas competing for control of the municipal apparatus in Saint-Edmond-de-Grantham. The pro-church group, dominated by older, Old Stock residents who sought to grow community and reinforce local identity, whereas their Newcomer usurpers sought to limit municipal investment and involvement in developing communities. Because of this co-extensiveness, the following section dedicated to examining the political sphere will not reiterate the political programs of each civil society group. Instead, I will very briefly examine one aspect of the political dynamic: the event-driven instrumentalisation by both clans of open secularism and strict secularism's approaches in service of each clans' competing visions for the village's future and the past's place within it. Allow me try to explain what I mean.

¹³¹⁸ See interview with Ginette Letendre by Ryan Lux, September 18, 2020, 1:08:03 mins., original: « *Oh mon Dieu, c'est ça ! Il s'agit de reconnaître l'existence de personnes qui ont travaillé extrêmement dur et qui... Pour qui, parfois, c'est elle. Cela peut sembler un peu prétentieux, mais... D'un autre côté, ce sont des personnes qui voulaient un lieu où se réunir. Et quand on est croyant, c'est Dieu qui nous rassemble. Nous faisons tous partie de la même famille* ».

3. *Political Domain*

As noted above, in Saint-Edmond, as in countless other tiny municipalities, the political sphere is dependent upon the civil sphere, so 5), an open secularism model, one based on collaboration, is a natural approach. The best example of this practice was the creative way in which the pro-church council financed the church's renovations by renting space and promising to compensate the Parish for expenses through the eventual sale price.

This approach was essentially a variant of what Rimouski mayor Éric Forest proposed when he offered to purchase two churches and lands to finance the cathedral's renovation, *quid pro quo*. In both instances strict secularists cried foul citing primacy of the separation of Church and State. In Saint-Edmond, as elsewhere, proponents of 6), strict secularist arguments against Church-State collaboration were advanced by younger and more fiscally conservative politicians and their acolytes, who nominally rejected the public nature of religious institutions. But did these politicians really care so deeply about secularist philosophy? One could argue that it is more likely the case that strict secularism, and even claims of financial prudence, provided a convenient foil for politicians to avoid intervention in symbolically charged and politically non-lucrative social debates. Maybe in Rimouski or Quebec one could make that argument, but in a municipality of only 451 rate payers, the question of financing what was being rumoured as a \$1 million project would make the problem of cost far less abstract than in larger centres, where the issue can often be more of precedent, preference, and principle. Either way, in Rimouski and Quebec strict secularist discourse and fiscality were called on to malign church projects, however insincere. In Saint-Edmond, the philosophical difference between open and strict secularist political discourse seemed really to be about whether to 'secularise' community life, by taking it outside of municipal intervention and promoting urbanisation, individualisation, and privatisation.

Mayoral candidate Aliette Lajoie insisted that the church's erasure had almost nothing to do with religion *per se*. Instead, she said, "it was because of rivalry"¹³¹⁹. Being even modestly acquainted with the political atmosphere in Saint-Edmond-de-Grantham, I understood Lajoie's assertion on two levels: personal and social. As noted throughout these pages, personal animosities between the leaders most certainly exacerbated deeper underlying tensions between Old Stock and Newcomer visions for Saint-Edmond's future. The charter group had been at the helm of local politics since 1917, and the church question ignited a revolt against their long-privileged community priorities by the majority Newcomer group. One example effectively illustrates the dynamic. Jean-Claude Paradis complained that the new council entertained the proposal by subdivision residents for the municipality to spend enormous amounts of money to fill in the ditches and install culverts in the subdivisions. I draw on the example, merely to demonstrate how each group sought to use local government to pursue mutually exclusive interests¹³²⁰. Newcomers objected to the church project because they never used it, while Old Stock residents opposed filling the ditches because the benefits would be accrued only by neighbourhoods they never visited. So, if rational self-interest explains why the Newcomers would use their majority to oppose maintaining the church, it does not explain why they would block the transfer of the building to the responsibility of the Golden Age Club at the 11th hour, given that the renovations were already paid for, and it would save demolition costs. On the surface, caprice might be obvious. Given the physical violence, threats, and slander which coursed through the dispute, it is not impossible to consider that the local developer, through her proxies, was exacting revenge on the municipal

¹³¹⁹ See interview with Aliette Lajoie by Ryan Lux, September 15, 2020, 1:09:24mins., original: « *Je ne pense pas que ce soit la religion qui cause le déclin du village, mais plutôt les rivalités* ».

¹³²⁰ See interview with Jean-Claude Paradis by Ryan Lux, September 15, 2020, 43:06 mins., original: « *Ils veulent combler les fossés sur les îles où Madame réside. Oui, ils veulent tout enterrer. Le procès. Les rues. Ce sera plus propre. Il n'y aura plus de mauvaises herbes* ».

council that refused the taken-for-granted road subsidy. I suggest that the issue is related but runs much deeper. The competition over the destiny of Saint-Edmond's church should be understood as a symbolic confrontation, given its steep economic, political, and social cost that baffled even Reynald Girard and his ilk. At its core, the fight mobilised long-entrenched competition between traditionalist Old Stock local elites and their development-oriented counterparts with diametrically opposed visions for Saint-Edmond-de-Grantham. In a way, the church scandal represented a continuation of the original debate over whether or not to establish an independent parish in the first place. The Newcomers were simply a natural extension of the latter position. It is vital to keep in mind the adjacent conflict waged during the same period over the proposed development of 46 new homes behind the church property, which was foiled at every turn by conservative Old Stock residents using environmental and agricultural protections. By accident or destiny, the arch-symbol of the village became the prize and ultimate object of iconoclasm perpetrated by a social movement motivated by an individualistic vision for the future where aide memories of old solidarities would not stand in the way of a future dedicated to accelerated development. How does the church, or for that matter religion, factor into the equation? More perhaps than Aliette Lajoie might have thought.

G. Conclusion: Indications for Cultural Change

When asked about how they thought the experience of church closure in Saint-Edmond reflected wider cultural change, invariably, participants all admitted the singularity of the rural parish's nadir compared to those of their neighbouring church closures. They did, however, draw links between what transpired in Saint-Edmond-de-Grantham and broader social trends of polarised groups' increasing mutual incomprehension of each other's worldviews and increasingly irreconcilable social discourse, Reynald Girard mused that this tendency was exaggerated in Saint-Edmond-de-Grantham's church conflict because the option for indifference simply did not exist.

It's a problem, I think, all over Quebec and probably the world, of trying to reach a consensus, and consensuses are increasingly difficult to achieve, especially those involving intergenerational issues.¹³²¹

Michel Côté likewise identified generational divisions as a key factor pointing to cohorts' dramatically different experiences of religious socialisation. He argued that religious formation in schools established a common public culture that had recently become simply one option of many, which makes managing religious heritage especially divisive between cohorts without common religious references. He suggested that formerly universally accepted religious tenets

become optional when it is a private affair for which there is no advertising or promotion. So, if you're not invited to participate, you don't generally tend to impose yourself, you'll turn your back, you'll avoid it. And over the years, the distance increases¹³²².

According to Ginette Letendre, the absence of a shared accepted social code leads to the kinds of individualistic excesses which characterised the local church debate as well as a generalised phenomenon of people trying to resolve conflict by speaking loudly and seldom listening.

But the people, the citizens, were cold in the sense that they could not feel for the others. Yes, and that everyone wants to take it out on the other person, that's

¹³²¹ See interview with by Ryan Lux, Reynald Girard, September 17, 2020, 36:29 mins., original: « *Je pense que c'est un problème partout au Québec, et probablement partout dans le monde, d'essayer de parvenir à un consensus, et le consensus devient de plus en plus difficile à atteindre, surtout lorsqu'il s'agit de questions intergénérationnelles. C'est assez difficile et cela cause beaucoup de problèmes* ».

¹³²² See interview with by Ryan Lux, Reynald Girard, September 17, 2020, 1:07:05 mins., original: « *Comme ce n'est pas obligatoire dans le système scolaire public, cela devient facultatif dans le système privé, pour lequel il n'y a eu ni publicité ni promotion. Ainsi, si vous n'êtes pas invité à participer, vous n'avez généralement pas tendance à vous imposer, vous tournez le dos, vous contournez la question. Et au fil des ans, vous la contournez de plus en plus* ».

disturbing. It didn't bother them because it has become, I think, a very individualistic mentality»¹³²³.

As an interested observer of the closure and someone with an intimate and long perspective of Quebec's socioreligious change since the Quiet Revolution, Abbé Dubois drew a connection between Saint-Edmond-de-Grantham's recent painful episode and what he saw as a society which had evacuated its civility. He complained that people have become so uncompromising with those who do not share their views and prefer to entrench themselves in their ideas and abuse one another. His diagnosis for the situation was that people no longer base their behaviour on values but rather they act out of self-love¹³²⁴. Abbé Dubois drew a straight line between contemporary society's incapacity to establish commonly accepted social virtues and the Quiet Revolution's rejection of traditional morality.

But we changed everything. And I think that from the moment we wanted to change, we didn't pay attention to what we were doing and now we're living with the consequences of all that. There were values we sacrificed by accident, values that sustain people as human beings, that allow us to live in peace. Like respect for one another. The forgiveness we give to someone who offends us. Because sometimes we get hurt. But if we rebel every time, it's a bad idea. And I think that's what the Quiet Revolution didn't recognise, it happened too quickly¹³²⁵.

¹³²³ See interview with Ginette Letendre by Ryan Lux, September 18, 2020, 19:33 mins., original: « *Mais les gens, les citoyens, étaient indifférents dans le sens où l'on pouvait sentir l'autre personne. Oui, et le fait que tout le monde veuille s'en prendre à l'autre est dérangeant. Cela ne les dérangeait pas, parce que c'était devenu un état d'esprit très individualiste, je pense* ».

¹³²⁴ *Idem.*, 37:24 mins., original: « *C'est pour ça que tu te disputes avec tes voisins, parce que ça ne marche pas, ils n'ont pas la même position que toi, tu prends parti dans une élection, l'autre personne ne va pas être comme toi et elle va être têtue. Et puis il y a les insultes. Oui, mais tu vois où ça mène : au chaos. Reprenez-vous. Vous entendrez alors des conseils pour faire moins de mal. Savez-vous que l'autre personne dit peut-être des bêtises parce qu'elle est aussi ignorante que vous ? Êtes-vous ignorant ? Pendant que nous faisons des choses stupides, revenez à vos valeurs et vous trouverez la paix* ».

¹³²⁵ See interview with Abbé Gilles Dubois by Ryan Lux, September 14, 2020, 39:24 mins., original: « *Mais nous avons tout changé. Et je pense que c'est à ce moment-là que nous voulions du changement, mais nous n'avons pas prêté attention à ce que nous faisons. Et maintenant, nous vivons avec les conséquences de tout cela. Il y a des valeurs que nous avons sacrifiées, dont nous ne voulions plus, des choses qui nous soutiennent, qui nous permettent de rester en paix. Comme le respect des autres. Pardonner à quelqu'un qui nous offense. Parce que parfois, on nous dit des mots blessants. Mais si on se rebelle à chaque fois, ce n'est pas une bonne idée. Et je pense que c'est ce que la Révolution tranquille n'a pas compris, oui, ça s'est passé trop vite* ».

Thus, even if the conflict over the church of Saint-Edmond's was not directly about the place of religion in the community or even the Church for that matter, the past 60 years of religious change, or what Danièle Hervieu-Léger describes as exculturation¹³²⁶, has progressively eroded society's ability to politely disagree, debate, and to think from the Other's perspective and thus produced the kind of social climate in which a formerly tight-knit village can come very near to committing collective social suicide¹³²⁷. From this perspective, Abbé Dubois and others' observations of intergenerational conflict, hyper-individualism, and a society unmoored from values rooted in respect for the 'Other'. For some, the church building was a poetic object that crystallised some of what they saw as the most nefarious aspects of recent cultural transformations. Abbé Dubois recalled that in his youth, in moments of crisis, the village would flock to the church to overcome difficulties. It is ironic that now churches are causing crises. Although it is the case least related to actual religious conflict or debates about what constitutes religious heritage, even at its minuscule scale, Saint-Edmond's church closure can offer such lofty insights into the consequences of the transformation of Quebec society and the place of the Catholic Church as a public religion within it. In Saint-Edmond we see two visions of society confront one another. One looked to preserving elements of a disappearing social order determined by attachment to place and the cultivation of memory. The other was dedicated to mobility, a willful erasure of the past, and the ennobling of individual pursuit.

¹³²⁶ See Danièle Hervieu-Léger, *Catholicisme : La fin d'un monde*, Paris, Bayard, 2003.

¹³²⁷ *Idem*.

IX. Conclusion: the social dynamics and foundations of Catholic church closure in Quebec in the beginning of the 21st Century

It is hard to overestimate the social and religious significance of Quebec's contemporary wave of church closures, which has been sweeping across its territory closing French-Canadian Quebecers' sacred spaces on a scale never experienced by a majority Catholic Nation. Since 1998, some 650 Roman Catholic churches have been closed, demolished, and transformed, ranging from the most banal to exquisite examples of religious architecture. Since I started working on my thesis, the phenomenon has accelerated from the periphery to the core of Québec Catholicism. Rapidly declining religious indicators offer little probability of the reprieve hoped for during the 1980s.

Because this project has taken so long to bring to term, it has the benefit of a decade's long observation of the phenomenon as a whole and the intensive analysis of three cases almost from their outset to their conclusion, which would not have been the case had my progress been more punctual. Through the process of induction, I have been able to draw a series of conclusions and raise further questions about what church closures, in a variety of social, demographic, and geographic contexts, reflect on the present phase of secularisation and the concomitant social transformation of Quebec and its deinstitutionalising effects in a society where mentalities, despite popular public discourses, arguably continue to bear deep impressions of its Catholic past.

To be clear, like all theses, this one has its limits. First, Montréal is absent. I did study a case in Quebec's metropolis, but due to time constraints, I was not able to include it. Secondly, Montreal presents a different socio-religious context compared to the rest of Quebec. Religious practice differs dramatically between immigrants and *de souche* Quebecers and they happen to be overwhelmingly concentrated in Quebec's largest city. That being said, Montreal is an important part of Quebec's religious landscape, and I will treat it with the precision it deserves in a forthcoming article. Thirdly, I only studied conflictual closures, which represent, by far, the

minority of cases. Most church closures in Quebec have been either consensual or indifferent. The cases I selected are dramatic. I suggest that all church closures have the potential to ignite, but lack the necessary sociological flammables, so I chose to study cases with all of the ingredients to try to understand the problem of church closure in its fullest empirical expression. Another study should take the peaceful element of Quebec's church closure into account. Fourthly, one of my cases, Saint-Jean-Baptiste, is not totally resolved. The City now owns the church, but momentum is stalled on finding a new vocation. Lastly, it must be admitted that the question of religious heritage is dominated by men. Women were present in all cases, but men formed the vast majority of key actors.

Let us remind ourselves of our initial questions. First, we wanted to understand the social dynamics behind the closure of churches in Quebec, in the context of social, political, economic, and religious conflict. We also sought to understand the characteristics of conflictual cases, the types of actors involved, and the issues raised. Third, we tried to understand what the actual closure meant for parishioners and citizens affected by this phenomenon. At a more fundamental level, we attempted to identify what the closure of a church revealed about a society undergoing secularisation and a Church undergoing exculturation—in a context of widespread aging of the population and the infrastructure of the Catholic institution in Quebec. We were surprised by the number and intensity of the issues raised by social actors through these closures. In each church closure, there is something of nostalgia for an enchanted world and a meaningful traditional society, for a unity of culture, as Fernand Dumont would have said.¹³²⁸ Resistance to closure is as loud as the effects of those that profit from the destruction of churches. Each side proposes an allegory on the fate of culture and religion in Quebec and implicitly proposes a definition of what

¹³²⁸ Fernand Dumont, *Le sort de la culture*, Montréal, Éditions de l'Hexagone, 1995.

should ideally be. Nostalgics, romantics, communitarians, individualists, pragmatists, and cynics assemble here and seek to impose an interpretation of the present social transition from one order to the next that, potentially, can be illustrated by the fate of a church.

But let's not get ahead of ourselves. First, we should break down, dimension by dimension, what is at stake in each of the three cases observed. At their core, every conflictual closure needs to at least be supported by some kind of physical structural problem paired with the nearly universal demographic challenge of religious practice.

A. Church Closure Participants: Dramas With Six Roles

Like Greek tragedies, the dramas unleashed generally by church closures feature typical figures who seem to invariably impose themselves. Because the Catholic Church is organised according to uniform institutional roles and practices, and its civil affairs are governed by the same Parish Law, a certain stability across contexts is to be expected. Moreover, religious heritage bureaucracies, funding models, and secularism laws all apply uniformly across Quebec's territory. Closures of different religion's churches or of Catholic churches in other pluralistic parts of Canada, for example, would not be so easily comparable. After documenting 650 closures, archiving each media report associated with them, deeply analysing eight, carrying out ethnological work on four, and ultimately fully reporting on three, six types of church closure, typical actors predictably emerged. The six types hail from the three social domains most impacted by closure: the religious, civil society, and political spheres. Each sphere polarises over the church question, and produces two different types informed by distinct worldviews, determined by religious sensibility, views on religious heritage, and the public role of religion. From the religious sphere, there are 1), Modernist Catholics, and 2), Traditionalist Catholics. The civil society sphere

gives us 3), Institutional civil society and 4), Grassroots civil society. Lastly, out of the political sphere, we see 5), Strict secularist politicians and 6), their Open secularist counterparts. The predominance and orientation of each figure depend on the closure context.

1. Modernist Catholics

They want to preserve their local parish churches and active congregations. Regardless of heritage value, this group forms the vast majority of practising Catholics and mirrors its demographics, being mostly baby boomers and older. They are at once institutional conformists and a social subculture.

2. Traditionalist Catholics

This rare type of practising Catholic feels alienated by Vatican II's individualist style. While they have no choice but to participate in the new liturgy, they feel more at home in Tridentine churches for aesthetic and liturgical reasons and the temporal nature of their religious sensibilities, which are nurtured by antiquity. They are motivated by ostentation and the public expression of religion.

3. Institutional Civil Society

With respect to religious heritage, Institutional civil society actors are keen on secular transformations, not because they oppose religious practice, but because they see secular reappropriation of churches, especially large historic examples, as the only way to assure their continued presence in the long-term.

4. Grassroots Civil Society,

These actors are confident in their collective claim to Church property, even if they do not practise with any regularity. They employ a populist style and emerge in *ad hoc* fashion, generally in

resistance to Institutional civil society and Modernist Catholic transformation plans, for which they feel they are not adequately consulted.

5. Strict Secularist Politicians

As a rule, this type of politician is willing to risk church demolition in order to stay out of a divisive episode of church closures. Their worldview is forward-looking and fiscal. These politicians count on younger voters' lack of religious socialisation and mobilise secularist discourses

6. Open Secularist Politicians

They are comfortable with close collaboration and are very uncomfortable with significant changes to the social order and seek to protect the existing one. Politicians of this ilk count on the support of Cultural Catholics' identity orientation.

B. Socioreligious Similarities: Common Elements of Religious Conflict

All three cases were characterised by high degrees of ethnic homogeneity and nearly universally shared historical religious affiliation. These conditions facilitate analysing church closures as a total social fact. Indeed, these cases offer laboratory-like conditions for sociology to test the effects of secularisation's latest stage on public churches and the social consequences of their closures. While homogeneity is not only the absence of complicating variables in and of itself, it can also be considered a determining factor in secularisation according to David Martin's general theory of secularisation. The composition of these societies affords our analysis a single and consistent national context, which simplifies cultural and structural considerations of Quebec's French-Canadian secularisation story. Martin argues that homogenous societies experience

secularisation more acutely than pluralistic societies and I would add probably experience the patrimonialisation of their religious past with greater need and salience¹³²⁹.

1. Institutional factors

Similarities are most striking and expected with respect to how the Church, as an institution, influences conflictual closure, given that it usually operates according to top-down principles and dictates within a shared hierarchical structure. The most determinative institutional factors are the dearth of clergy and the excess supply of church infrastructure. The massive excess of church capacity, compared to the number of regularly practising Catholics, is endemic across Quebec, where in 1965, four out of five French-Canadians attended Mass on a weekly basis. Now it is one in 1 out of 10 at most¹³³⁰..

2. Religious Offer

Another important source of religious resistance to church closure comes from churches' religious specificity. In other words, people are more motivated to defend a church on religious grounds if it fills a liturgical niche. By appealing to local group affinity, special liturgy can reinforce local attachment by nurturing a community's particularity or, conversely, draw support from outside parish limits for specific practices. For example, Saint-Edmond's celebration of local couples' anniversaries is an example of hyperlocal specificity, whereas its popular pilgrimage is an example of external appeal. Moreover, Saint-Edmond's flexible approach to the Mass allowed it to continue even after the transformation and closure with its migration first to the sacristy and then to the recreation chalet, until Covid. Lastly, the vitality of the pilgrimage meant it survived the church

¹³²⁹ See David Martin, *A General Theory of Secularization*, Oxford, Basil-Blackwell, 1978.

¹³³⁰ See E.-Martin Meunier & Sarah Wilkins-Laflamme, « Sécularisation, catholicisme et transformation du régime de religiosité au Québec. Étude comparative avec le catholicisme au Canada (1968-2007) », *Recherches Sociographiques*, 52(3), 2011, p. 689. <https://www.erudit.org/fr/revues/rs/2011-v52-n3-rs5005802/1007655ar.pdf>.

and is the only reason why religious ritual continues to take place in the village. Saint-Jean-Baptiste responded to its immediate milieu by particularly attending to its queer and vulnerable communities as well as the wider community through its national celebrations for the feast of Saint-Jean-Baptiste and Christmas Eve party. Rimouski's appeal was the pomp and circumstance of its ecclesiastical liturgies, and the prestige associated with its cathedral status, but also its organ concerts and artistic events.

C. Socioreligious Differences: contextual religious inflections of a general pattern of fusion and closure

Rates of regular religious practice varied significantly between Saint-Germain-de-Rimouski, Saint-Jean-Baptiste and Saint-Edmond-de-Grantham although all fell below 10 per cent of the total population. I gleaned the following demographic insights from my field work observations, conversations with participants – notably the respective parish priests -, and the best statistics I could procure from census and diocesan data.

1. Demographics and Religious Differences

Although one might be tempted to assume that religious practice would be strongest in Saint-Edmond-de-Grantham considering its long-time traditional societal model,¹³³¹ in fact, Rimouski offered the strongest levels of religious practice¹³³², the least mobility¹³³³ and the highest levels of

¹³³¹ It has more priests per capita than any other diocese, has experienced the fewest closures, and most transformations have been consensual and resulted in the municipal purchase of the church while continuing to offer religious services. See The Canadian Conference of Bishops, *Canadian Catholic Church Directory*, Montreal, Novalis, 2025.

¹³³² See « Statistiques globales du Diocèse de Rimouski depuis 1946 », Catholic Hierarchy, (web), consulted February 28, 2025, <https://www.catholic-hierarchy.org/diocese/drmo.html>.

¹³³³ See Statistics Canada, "Census Profile: City of Rimouski", 2016, (web), consulted February 28, 2025, <https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/dp-pd/prof/details/page.cfm?Lang=E&Geo1=CSD&Code1=2410043&Geo2=POPC&Code2=0709&SearchText=rimouski&SearchType=Begin&SearchPR=01&B1=All&TABID=1&type=0>.

religious transmission based on sacramental participation at all levels¹³³⁴. For a religion to remain viable, it needs to induct new members on a regular basis, something which was not a problem in Quebec until 2001 when *de facto* sacramental preparation ceased being offered in schools. Since then, parishes have, to greater or lesser success, offered catechism classes themselves. Childhood sacraments have the effect of encouraging the whole family to increase their religious practice, at least for intervals. When childhood sacraments disappear, it is assured that a parish will not be able to renew itself.

Believe it or not, but children up to the age of confirmation used to make up the bulk of practising Catholics¹³³⁵. It should be no surprise then that Rimouski's resistance to church closure was primarily religious in nature and ultimately responsible for conserving the cathedral's religious vocation. But demographics are not the only differential religious factor which influenced the various outcomes of our three conflictual church closures. Culture has its role to play as well.

2. Guerre des clochers: Geographic and Cultural factors of fusion

Guerre des clochers, turf wars in English, are geographically determined rivalries between parishes, usually over local prestige in fields like sports, cultural achievements, or domains like the economy or politics. The figurative term, which refers to localities' steeples as leitmotifs for the collectivity, is manifested in a literal sense by the religious competition engendered by church closures, which begins with parish fusions and is followed by the inevitable decision of which

¹³³⁴ In 2016 there were 2,280 infants 0-4 and in the same year there were 998 baptisms the vast majority of which would have been for newborns. We can say that the vast majority of newborns were therefore baptised. If we compare Rimouski's rate of confirmations from 2017, when Cardinal Lacroix complained about the 25 per cent first communion rate in his diocese, of the 1,543 12-year-olds baptised in 2005, 730 were confirmed, a little less than half of the baptised cohort. It is clear that owing to Rimouski's stable population, rooted across generations, that there is a certain amount of family and peer pressure which assure a critical mass which maintains the relative vitality of sacramental traditions and thus religious transmission.

¹³³⁵ See Guillaume Cuchet, *Comment notre monde a cessé d'être chrétien : Anatomie d'un effondrement*, Paris, Le Seuil, 2018.

church to close. As Weber might have observed, church closure unfolds as ‘social closure’, in the competition it unleashes over the control of the French-Canadian symbolic universe¹³³⁶. In Quebec, where most francophone social services were organised through the parish, the legal and bureaucratic independence of parishes from one another gestated distinct cultures. These territorial divisions, and their concomitant competing identities, in many instances, survived the secularisation of the Quiet Revolution. Parish fusions force union between hyperlocal cultures that evolved in opposition to one another and given the high stakes of church closure, conflict is often inevitable. Rimouski, Saint-Jean-Baptiste quarter, and Saint-Edmond-de-Grantham each had very different experiences of fusions, which are sometimes visualised as the loosening of a net’s webbing as territorial borders expand to compensate for reduced religious practice. The two major vectors of this conflict were class and religious sensibility. Most fusions are inherently uncomfortable because there were often legitimate reasons to sever parishes and erect new ones that did not disappear when people stopped going to church *en masse*.

Lastly, it is important to mention that parish fusions and erections are the only tools that Quebec’s Catholic bishops have at their disposal to influence closures. It is a favourite tool because they can be achieved at the stroke of a pen. They have become normalised and are often welcomed as a relief to parish councils, which are personally responsible for any debts. They also allow gerrymandering, which can assure dioceses’ preferred outcomes by allowing them to determine majority positions for votes to suppress parishes. For Rimouski’s cathedral’s parishioners specifically, they did not even countenance the idea that the fusion could mean the closure of their church given its ecclesiastical status. In Quebec City the fact that it was the other parishes that had

¹³³⁶ See Max Weber, “Economy and Society”, in Guenther Roth & Claus Wittich (translators & dirs.), *Economy and society: An outline of interpretive sociology*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1978, [1922]. p. 342.

been annexed to theirs, led many to believe that as the senior partner, Saint-Jean-Baptiste would be the one to survive the merger. In Saint-Edmond-de-Grantham, residents welcomed the absorption. They went into the fusion clear-eyed that their church would eventually be sold to the municipality and confident that it would be transformed for the use of future generations.

3. Effect on Practice

In Rimouski the new federated governance structure may have motivated parishioners already active in their congregations but the absence of a dedicated priest for each church and the possibility of frequenting multiple churches according to convenience meant that there was no one keeping track of attendance, which can disincentivise assiduity and dilute feelings of attachment. From another perspective, combining parish resources and governance can also lead an average parishioner to de-responsibilise as recognition for contributions and power over decision making is subsumed on too large of a scale to make a satisfying impact on a person's motivation. For the Saint-Jean-Baptiste members, the writing was on the wall that the church's future lay in a secular vocation, once avenues to generate new operating revenues within the parish structure were exhausted. In Saint-Edmond only the most committed 15-30 practising Catholics remained. This dynamic, however, would have had an impact on religious practice. Ginette Letendre explained that the small group was experimental in their liturgy, and its dynamic was more akin to a prayer group or small cell than a true parish. The effect would be similar to exculturation in that practice no longer had to appeal to a wide swath of the population and therefore could become more specialised to suit the remaining members while alienating others.

4. Financial Relationship

The question of money aggravates existing cultural and territorial differences. There are many examples of dioceses' opportunistic closures of healthy parishes following fusions, Saint-Pierre

l'Apôtre in the Diocese of Saint-Jean Longueil¹³³⁷, or Sacré-Coeur in Sherbrooke come to mind. More often though, there are no obvious solutions to systemic and structural financial challenges faced notably by Quebec's monster naves. Their scale reflects a mentality oriented around design considerations, which depends on inputs which would be hallucinatory today, perhaps in the same way malls and big box stores will be judged by future generations. Contemporary economic realities make them virtually impossible to meet neo-liberal cultural policy's expectations of self-sufficiency.

5. Experience of Closure

Rimouski's closure could have been relatively short-lived. Had the city's cultural Catholics been willing to accept a secular transformation or if the Diocese had appreciated the degree of their opposition to the idea, much bad blood could have been avoided. In Quebec City, the closure period was defined more by uncertainty and impatience than the full-blown social conflict that was experienced in Rimouski. Saint-Jean-Baptiste was more of a bureaucratic affair. The desacralisation, meanwhile was successfully sacramentally ritualised. In Saint-Edmond-de-Grantham the crisis was more tribal than religious and fought over competing visions of maintaining a traditional society or embracing rapid change and development.

6. Different battlefields, the same munitions

Within the religious domain, the fusion experience is the most determinative of how a conflictual closure will unfold. It is during the fusion process where pre-existing conflicts, whether class, geographic, or cultural, will manifest and become aggravated. I compared variables which took

¹³³⁷ See « Les pierres vivantes de Saint-Pierre-Apôtre, mémoire déposé au gouvernement du Québec à la commission parlementaire sur le patrimoine religieux », La communauté chrétienne de Saint-Pierre-Apôtre, Autumn 2005, (web), consulted February 28, 2025, <https://www.assnat.qc.ca/fr/travaux-parlementaires/commissions/cc-37-1/journal-debats/CC-050920.html>.

into account parish's willingness to unite their fates and fortunes with others, how practice was impacted, the nature of governance and financial relationships among former parishes, and the way in which closure was eventually implemented. Positive and relatively short fusions can happen when all parties are clear about the nature of the union, as was the case in Saint-Edmond-de-Grantham. Saint-Germain-de-Rimouski demonstrates that the inevitability of diocesan tyranny over the process's outcome should not be taken for granted where religious practice is still as strong as it was in Rimouski. For its part, Saint-Jean-Baptiste shows us that charity between communities cannot be counted on indefinitely in the way a rich parish was relied upon by a poor one in Quebec City. Often, as was the case in Saint-Edmond-de-Grantham, communities respect each other's financial autonomy, and in other instances, like in Rimouski, sharing finances can incite predatory and opportunistic behaviour. In all cases, we see that fusions are accepted as inevitable but have limited effects on religious practice. One thing that is certain, as we saw across all three cases, is that the primary goal of fusions is closure and not merely to save on administrative costs, as they are often initially presented.

D. Civic Similarities: A Nation of Parishes

Historically, amongst French-Canadians, there was very little distinction between the religious and civil spheres. Large swathes of secular life such as virtually all social services, labour unions, media, community and charitable organisations, professional groups, politics, even colonisation were under either direct control of the clergy or heavily influenced by it. The Church decided which books could be distributed and which films shown. Most financial contributions to fund social infrastructure were levied by the Church and it ran a modern bureaucracy that vastly outnumbered that of the Québec State until the 1960s. The Church ran Quebec society in a comprehensive, ultramontane manner, and discouraged French-Canadians from becoming active

in spheres outside of its control such as the economy or the military, which were controlled by the federal government and anglophone Montreal elites.¹³³⁸ On a day-to-day basis, with respect to most French-Canadians, the Church, an institution which drew its ranks from all levels of French-Canadian society, assured what amounted to complete sociological autonomy until industrialisation and urbanisation started to loosen its grip. Unlike English Canada, where extreme religious sectarianism relegated religion to the private sphere¹³³⁹, French Canada saw their Church as the guardian and steward of their civil society and, for a long time, rightly saw it as a source of independence. This socioreligious Church-Nation configuration was the prime nation-binding technology for French Canada in terms of what Harold McLuhan conceived of as both space and time, and individual parishes played the same role on a microcosmic scale in the secular lives of their members.¹³⁴⁰

1. High Levels of Attachment and Identification

Although it is not easy to untangle churches' religious and secular significations, a clear vector emerged across our three cases: independence. The presence of a church, has, and continues to, mean that a district's population is self-sufficient. The opposite is clearly a state of dependence, and church closure, even for people who do not go to Mass or particularly care about the state of religion, reflects the decline of a region's (Rimouski's archdiocesan cathedral closure)

¹³³⁸ See Hamelin, Jean & Nicole Gagnon, *Histoire du catholicisme Québécois*, Volume III : Le XXe siècle. Tome 1 : 1898-1940 ; Jean Hamelin, Tome 2 : De 1940 à nos jours. Sous la direction de Nive Voisine. Montréal, Boréal Express, 1984, p. 504 et 425 & Laurin-Frenette, Nicole et Louis Rousseau, « Les centres de la regulation: Essai sur les rapports entre l'Église et l'État dans l'histoire québécoise », *Studies in Religion/Sciences Religieuses*, 12(3), 1983, p. 247-272.

¹³³⁹ See S.D. Clark, *Church and Sect in Canada*. Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1948.

¹³⁴⁰ See Ferretti, Lucia, « La société paroissiale en milieu urbain. Saint-Pierre-Apôtre de Montréal, 1848-1930 », Doctorat en histoire, UQAM, 1990.

neighbourhood's (Saint-Jean-Baptiste), or village's (Saint-Edmond-de-Grantham) ability to be the master of their own house.

Municipalities did not even exist in Quebec until 1831. Before then, the parish regulated all local affairs.¹³⁴¹ Even after they were introduced, their territories were, for the most part, exactly the same as religious boundaries, which only reinforced existing identities. Dioceses controlled social institutions and clergy sat on virtually all boards and commissions. This remained virtually unchanged until the 1960s, and in many ways beyond. Political leaders worked with clergy to govern their shared flocks, which until the forced amalgamations of 2001 were more than less the same.

2. High degrees of participation in Church Closure

Conflictual church closures, by their very nature, imply a strong civil society involvement. To my knowledge, there have not been any plausible conflictual church closures that have not spilled from the religious, into the civil sphere, and from the civil, into the political sphere. That is because, most often, the active practising community simply does not have the resources to mount a credible resistance on their own. Conflictual closures require both grassroots and institutional elements of civil society to demand political intervention. They do this first by valorising the church's significance to non-practising wider society, using heritage as their argument. Civil society claims emphasise the importance of identity (history and memory) and culture (high and low) using a combination of populist and expert discourses, although these do not always combine towards the same desired result.

3. Secular Interests: Quebec particularism and memory

Civil society's consistently high degree of participation in conflictual church closures, like its high levels of attachment to its churches, has a structural origin in the Parish Law. Unlike other jurisdictions where churches are diocesan property, in Quebec they belong to parishes, composed of its baptised members. The practical consequence of this law, while contested by the Quebec Assembly of Catholic Bishops, who distinguish between collective good and collective property¹³⁴², has meant that often churches are simply transferred to public groups for the symbolic sum of \$1. The psychological legacy of the Church's heavy taxation of its flock is that most Quebecers consider churches their property and the practical effect has largely confirmed this orientation. While indifferent closures are the most profitable for dioceses, consensual closures are almost always ceded to collective vocations. Conflictual closures take place when closures are perceived to have financial motives, usually over the attempt to abdicate responsibility to save money or to opportunistically profit from the sale of a newer and viable parish. Civil society organisations see church closures as opportunities to express their public function and compete to benefit from religious heritage financing from the Quebec government as a means of attracting external funding to their communities.

E. Civil Society Differences: splitting hairs

Our three cases demonstrate more similarities than differences in terms of civil society engagement. The most significant differences derive from context and discourses used to justify its intervention Institutional and Grassroots civil society actors. For example, in Rimouski, Committee 1862 sought to save the cathedral by attracting outside funding based on new vocations.

¹³⁴² « Patrimoine religieux du Québec : réponse à la consultation générale de la commission de la culture de l'Assemblée Nationale du Québec », Assemblée des Évêques du Québec, August 31, 2005.

It justified this approach by appealing to the cathedral's status as an important regional historic symbol, not necessarily its architectural value. Grassroots civil society, which emerged as an *ad hoc* organisation, had explicitly religious and identitary motives and mounted an aggressive campaign against the Church and Institutional Civil Society. In the case of Saint-Jean-Baptiste, Grassroots efforts sprung from a well-established network whose motives were largely community oriented while Institutional civil society was explicitly mobilised to preserve the church as a work of art and national monument. Meanwhile in Saint-Edmond-de-Grantham, the conflict between Institutional pro-church and Grassroots anti-church civil society revolved around the church as a symbol of control over their village's destiny between groups with diametrically opposed interests. Differences in civil society's intervention in church closure reflect the specificity of the social nature of the conflict and as the three cases demonstrate, church closures are ideal events upon which to project long percolating social grievances.

F. Political Similarities: Congruous mobilisation of identity

Of all the domains, the political is the most similar across all our three cases. That is probably because, by nature, politicians are conformist and because they are the least willing participants of closure, but also because their horizon of action is explicitly framed by provincial laws, most notably, Bill 21 on secularism, the Parish Law, and the Municipal Act. In the same manner, their orientation towards religious heritage generally falls into either the open or strict secularist poles. While Bill 21 has virtually no legally binding impact on support for religious

heritage, its mere existence makes all politicians aware of how their actions could be perceived whenever they approach religious subject matter.¹³⁴³

For outsiders, Quebec's quasi-constitutional approach to secularism might seem bewildering. For example, politicians were, until recently, reticent to remove crucifixes from their chambers¹³⁴⁴ or stop opening their proceedings with the Our Father prayer for fear of a backlash¹³⁴⁵. At the same time, the vast majority of French-Canadians strongly support the banishment of religious symbols from public spaces and punish certain civil servants who insist upon wearing them¹³⁴⁶. The orthodox understanding of this dynamic is double, much like Quebecers' relationship to religion, love and hate¹³⁴⁷. While politicians have defended prayer and the crucifix as heritage, they also explain their discomfort with ostentatious religious symbols by recalling the religious excesses

I. ¹³⁴³ See Solange Lefebvre & Lori G. Beaman, *Religion in the Public Sphere: Canadian Case Studies*, University of Toronto Press, 2014; David Koussens, "Neutrality of the State and Regulation of Religious Symbols in Schools in Québec and France", *Social Compass*, 56(2), 2009, p. 202-213; Efe Parker, "Postcolonial imaginaries in the West: secular state-building and cultural defence in Québec since the Quiet Revolution", *Politics, Religion & Ideology*, 25, 2024, p. 218-242; and Catherine Foisy, « Représentations du catholicisme et mémoire de la Révolution tranquille : le projet de loi 60 entre spectre et dialogue », in David Koussens & Catherine Foissy (dirs.), *Représentations du catholicisme et mémoire de la Révolution tranquille : le projet de loi 60 entre spectre et dialogue*, Les Presses de l'Université Laval, 2018, p. 293-310.

¹³⁴⁴ See « Le retrait du crucifix du Salon bleu adopté à l'unanimité », *Ici Radio-Canada*, March 28, 2019, (web), consulted February 28, 2025. <https://ici.radio-canada.ca/nouvelle/1161072/caq-retirer-crucifix-salon-bleu-assemblee-nationale>.

¹³⁴⁵ See « Prières bannies dans l'espace public: 'C'est trop facile d'interdire', réagit l'ex-maire Tremblay », *Le Journal de Québec*, December 6, 2024, (web), consulted February 28, 2025, <https://www.journaldemontreal.com/2024/12/06/prieres-bannies-dans-lespace-public-cest-trop-facile-dinterdire-reagit-lex-maire-tremblay#:~:text=L'ancien%20maire%20de%20Saguenay,encadrement%20avec%20des%20r%C3%A8gles%20pr%C3%A9cises.&text=%C2%ABSi%20tu%20fais%20une%20pri%C3%A8re,l%C3%A0%2C%20%C3%A7a%20ne%20marche%20pas.>

¹³⁴⁶ See Emilie Nicolas, « Les mythes et réalités de la loi 21 », *Le Devoir*, August 11, 2022, (web), consulted February 28, 2025, <https://www.ledevoir.com/opinion/chroniques/743721/les-mythes-et-realites-de-la-loi-21>. E.-Martin Meunier et Jacob Legault-Leclair, « Les inquiétudes d'une majorité et la Loi 21 : le Québec, le catholicisme et la laïcité en 2019 », *Revue Internationale des Francophonies*, La laïcité : problématiques et pratiques dans l'espace francophone, 8, 2020, URL : <http://riffrancophonies.com/rif/index.php?id=1167>.

¹³⁴⁷ E.-Martin Meunier et Jean-François Laniel, « Nation et catholicisme culturel au Québec : dynamique d'une recomposition », *Studies in Religion – Sciences religieuses*, 41(4), décembre 2012, p. 595-617.

Quebeckers suffered before the Quiet Revolution during the Great Darkness (1840-1960)¹³⁴⁸. Some people explain the paradox as an expression of xenophobia, but my experience in the field has made me understand that for Quebeckers, historic religious symbols refer more to the Nation than they do the Church and new symbols are implicitly linked with a refusal by Newcomers to integrate into the Nation, represented by secularised Catholic symbols.

The dynamic has been described in French as *catholaïcité*, or Catholic secularism, rooted in conservative nativism¹³⁴⁹. Catherine Foisy and David Koussens describe the movement as having accelerated in past decades and Catholically driven¹³⁵⁰. Politically, this makes supporting Catholic religious heritage, doubly appealing when it involves announcing funding or denouncing the Church's heritage lassitude. Yet, politicians, like most of us, are hypersensitive to accusations of prejudice, so they fear the possibility of opponents wielding secularist arguments against investments in religious heritage. While it is probably true that minority religious groups occasionally engage in this kind of attack, it was my experience across our three cases, and my close observations over the last ten years, that these come from French-Canadians themselves. Open secularist politicians use nuance to justify Church-State collaborations¹³⁵¹, but especially on

¹³⁴⁸ See Yves Rochon, « Un combat malavisé contre la loi 21 », *Le Devoir*, November 23, 2020, <https://www.ledevoir.com/opinion/lettres/590364/un-combat-malavise-contre-la-loi-21>; Efe Peker, E., « Postcolonial imaginaries in the West: secular state-building and cultural defence in Québec since the Quiet Revolution ». *Politics, Religion & Ideology*, 25(2), 2024, p. 218–242.

¹³⁴⁹ See Céline Béraud et Bruno Dumons (dir.), *Catholicisme et identité. Regards croisés sur le catholicisme français contemporain (1980-2017)*, Paris, Karthala, 2017; Bruno Dumons, « Le « catholicisme d'identité », une recharge du catholicisme intransigeant ? : », dans *Catholicisme et identité*, Paris, Karthala, 2017; Olivier Audet, *Le tournant conservateur du nationalisme québécois : laïcité identitaire, populisme et construction d'une majorité « catho-laïque*, master's thesis, Université du Québec à Montréal, 2023.

¹³⁵⁰ See David Koussens & Catherine Foisy (dirs.), *Les catholiques québécois et la laïcité*, Montreal, Presses de l'Université de Montréal, 2018.

¹³⁵¹ See Philippe Portier, *L'État et les religions en France. Une sociologie historique de la laïcité*, Rennes, Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2016.

the local level, those who are ill-equipped, or unwilling to take the risk to do so, instrumentalise secularist policies to absolve themselves of the political effort¹³⁵².

Despite this tension, it is important to acknowledge that Quebec does not hesitate to invest in religious heritage and does so to a far greater extent than any other Canadian province, although compared to European states, its investments are a drop in the bucket. The Quebec government has been proportionally generous to Protestant and Jewish places of worship, which are few in number and thus an inexpensive way of assuaging accusations of non-secularism over the money funnelled overwhelmingly into Catholic churches over the past 30 years¹³⁵³. The federal government, through infrastructure funds, is also generally willing to contribute, as it provides good Canadian publicity for its Quebec politicians. It does not distinguish between religious or general heritage. Canada is so religiously plural that it hardly worries about secularism.

1. Opportunistic non-interference

What is key to remember for the cases studied here is that upper levels of government are loath to interfere in local conflicts, which is understandable given the volatile nature of religion in Quebec, so besides the social costs, church closure conflict also means the very real loss of up to 80 per cent funding for conservation projects. Every year, the conflict rages on and repairs become more and more expensive.

a) *Municipal*

Municipalities must have a strong vicarious configuration to confidently invest in either preservation or transformation because without it, for politicians, the cost is too high. They also

¹³⁵² See among other David Koussens, « Une laïcité moindre », in Celis, Leila et al. (eds.), *Modération ou extrémisme? Regards critiques sur la loi 21*, Quebec City, Les Presses de l'Université Laval, 2021, p. 83-96.

¹³⁵³ See « Aide financière », Conseil du patrimoine religieux du Québec, 2025, (web), consulted February 28, 2025, <https://www.patrimoine-religieux.qc.ca/fr/aide-financiere>.

require heritage status from the Religious Heritage Council for external legitimacy. Inevitably, questions of secularism arise, especially since the passage of Bill 21, often instrumentalised to justify inaction for political and or fiscal reasons.

Rimouski offered to buy modernist and easily transformable Saint-Pie-X. It had the added benefit of being adjacent to the city's sports facilities. Similarly, Québec purchased Saint-Denys-du-Plateau in 2013 to create the Monique-Corriveau Library in Sainte-Foy, and, of course, Saint-Edmond-de-Grantham's 2013 municipal council was enthusiastic about its acquisition of the village church. Older triumphalist churches like Saint-Germain and Saint-Jean-Baptiste are another story. Municipalities worry that large investments in religious heritage could be viewed negatively by some segments of the population and that heritage on that scale is simply not a municipal responsibility.

b) Québec government

The government of Quebec is usually ready to contribute to specific projects once a concrete plan is established that enjoys community consensus. Every closure participant I spoke with, however, blamed Quebec's religious heritage bureaucracy for its incoherence and reactive qualities. There seems to be a general consensus among upper levels of government that religious heritage has value and that most communities cannot fund them alone - although the problem is somewhat one of their own creation, by imposing radically heightened building standards and barring the kinds of collective community labour used to build them in the first place.

2. Popular election issues

Churches are like trains¹³⁵⁴, few people use them on a regular basis, but few and far between are they who wish them ill, especially on principle. Both are important sources of nostalgia and identity. Tried as I might, I could not find any nationwide opinion polls on religious heritage funding. It is either that the subject is taboo or that it is not even a question worth asking the answer being too obvious. Another way of discerning public support for religious heritage funding is the absence of any concerted opposition to it, which I failed to find. On the contrary, any mention of religious heritage funding is generally celebratory, often repeated on campaign trails, and credit for it is proudly festooned across Quebec on churches with banners proclaiming that “our religious heritage, it’s sacred!” It seems as long as the money comes from higher levels of government no one dares look a gift horse in the mouth. The approach is pure political patronage, a rare gift for contemporary politicians who seize on cut ribbons no matter how secularist they are.

a) National

Even if only 54 per cent of Quebecers identified themselves as Catholics for the 2021 census, a massive decline from the last time they were asked the question in 2011 when 75 per cent answered the same question¹³⁵⁵, the proportion of historically Catholic Quebecers is likely closer to 80 per cent. That means that, for whatever reason, politicians can count on religious heritage as a popular plank of any election platform. Judging by the way they trot out their funding announcements, it has been a successful strategy. Every party does it, in every riding, in every election cycle. The appeal of identity populism is too strong for them to resist it. Annually, the government spends

¹³⁵⁴ The recent announcement of fast-speed-train linking the Québec City-Windsor corridor estimated to cost \$3.9 billion was unanimously celebrated in the press and online when it was announced in February 2025.

¹³⁵⁵ See Statistics Canada, « Distribution (en pourcentage) des groupes religieux, Québec, 2011 et 2021 », 2022, (web), consulted February 2022, <https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2021/as-sa/fogs-spg/alternative.cfm?topic=10&lang=F&dguid=2021A000224&objectId=2>.

between \$20 and \$40 million on church restorations and conversions. It was \$24 million in 2022,¹³⁵⁶ \$33.3 million in 2023¹³⁵⁷ and \$25 million in 2024¹³⁵⁸. No party has ever accused a government of excess in this regard because they are all in on it.

However, despite the fact that national organisations representing architects, urbanists, musicians, and heritage experts regularly sound the alarm over what some have recently described as a “catastrophic” situation, it is curious that politicians rarely address the topic on the national stage, preferring rather to pose on the perrons of their ridings’ churches with the head of the Knights of Columbus and the Mayor. Maybe they worry that a national conversation might upset the delicately balanced apple cart that has thus far avoided upending despite its perilous path.

The commission produced a report in 2006 entitled *Believing in Quebec’s Religious Heritage*, which recommended sweeping State intervention into church conservation and positively bubbled with a mixture of populism and expertise¹³⁵⁹. Its recommendations were approved by the Standing Committee on Culture but its most daring proposals such as an outright moratorium on church closures were not adopted by the Liberal government of the day. The exercise of the commission is significant in that it demonstrates an obvious State interest in religious heritage as well as acknowledging a role for the State in its protection.

¹³⁵⁶ See Coalition Avenir Québec, « 24 M\$ pour la protection de notre patrimoine bâti », Press Release, June 28, 2022, (web), consulted February 28, 2025, <https://coalitionavenirquebec.org/fr/blog/2022/06/28/24-m-pour-la-protection-de-notre-patrimoine-bati/>.

¹³⁵⁷ See Quebec, « Patrimoine culturel à caractère religieux - Près de 35 M\$ pour la protection du patrimoine religieux québécois », Press Release, September 21, 2023, (web), consulted February 28, 2025, <https://www.Quebec.ca/nouvelles/actualites/details/patrimoine-culturel-a-caractere-religieux-pres-de-35-m-pour-la-protection-du-patrimoine-religieux-Québécois-50708>.

¹³⁵⁸ See François Gloutnay, « Patrimoine religieux: 30% de moins cette année », *Présence Information Religieuse*, August 27, 2024, (web), consulted February 28, 2025. <https://presence-info.ca/article/actualite/patrimoine/patrimoine-religieux-30-de-moins-cette-annee/>.

¹³⁵⁹ See Quebec, National Assembly, « Croire au patrimoine religieux du Québec », Ministère de la Culture et des Communications, 2006, (web), consulted February 28, 2025, https://bibliotheque.cecile-rouleau.gouv.qc.ca/documents/archives/pgq/A11A8_C76_2006.pdf.

3. Municipal

The problem with municipal politics, like in Rimouski, Quebec, and Saint-Edmond-de-Grantham, is that other priorities compete for a very limited sum. In all three cases, sports and entertainment investments won the day whenever a choice had to be made. Even if religious heritage is a popular election plank, it cannot outshine those kinds of projects. That being said, municipal politicians always make resolving a conflictually closed church's destiny the focus of their election campaigns. In all three cases, municipal politicians promised to "resolve" the problem.

G. Political Differences: Pork Barrel Politics

National governments have a track record of treating some churches differently than others. Heritage status is the key to national consideration. Without it, churches are disqualified from religious heritage funding. There are several other avenues, but without the highest level of heritage status, it is virtually impossible to attract subsidies from the national government owing to the crying need for investment and a plethora of eligible candidates. Despite supposedly being based on scientific criteria, established and adjudicated by experts, heritage status in Quebec is highly malleable depending on the winds of the day. The point is also to illustrate that heritage status is an eminently political consideration.

1. Leadership: The Understanding of General Moods

Because religion can be such a divisive issue, particularly in communities where it is polarising away from culture, leadership is the biggest variable in the political sphere. A successful leader in a conflictual closure is a rare commodity because once a closure becomes conflictual, it is hard to rein in. This often leads to prolonged battles of attrition, as we saw in Rimouski, where politicians were observers, and Quebec, where politicians were reluctant belligerents. Saint-Edmond's

conflict, in contrast, was more akin to *Blitzkrieg*, where a *coup d'état* wrestled power from incumbents who immortalised their victory with an ultimate iconoclastic gesture.

2. Social Domains as Arenas of Conflict

While I selected the three cases with the aim of portraying diverse geographic and social contexts to take into account population size and geographic location, the results presented an unexpectedly comprehensive representation of how conflicts are shaped depending on which arena they are principally fought in whether religious, civil society, or politics. A conflict's determinative sphere, the sphere in which the closure is principally contested, does not necessarily correspond to its population size or geographic location but, in an exemplary fashion, the closures I studied in Rimouski, Quebec, and Saint-Edmond-de-Grantham did and I suggest they represent the dominant tendencies I observed while compiling my church closure inventory. In descending order of demographic and geographic importance – not of conflict level, which would be the inverse – 1), Saint-Jean-Baptiste's closure was nationally and politically determined, 2), Saint-Germain-de-Rimouski's was regionally and religiously preponderant, and 3), Saint-Edmond-de-Grantham's experience was felt most keenly locally in the civil society sphere.

H. Social Domains: Exemplary cases of three socioreligious logics

1. Political Sphere: A National Question

Saint-Jean-Baptiste's battle was fought in the political sphere between the City, the diocese, and the Québec government over money, who or what would eventually manage and maintain the building, and what secular vocation it would serve. The City wanted to establish a new paradigm with the diocese but did not treat them as partners, and the diocese was tired of subsidising a building which served political and not religious purposes, as a national heritage site

and municipal service centre. But it is also fair to acknowledge that the diocese could have interpreted the same events differently.

2. Religious Sphere: An Ecclesiological Question

In Rimouski, the fight was over the cathedral's religious status and a zero-sum competition between retaining the cathedral's religious vocation and closing popular and less expensive parish churches which risked alienating practicing Catholics. Cultural and Traditionalist Catholics made an argument based on ecclesiastical logic of religious hierarchy as well as a heritage argument rooted in the cathedral's role in assuring the City's status as a regional capital for the Lower Saint-Lawrence and for spurring the religious institutional network, which continues to define the city to this day. This fight was not so much about the building's future, it was directed at its religious and institutional status.

3. Civil Society: A local Question

At stake in Saint-Edmond-de-Grantham's closure was a choice between its future as an agricultural village with a centre capable of nourishing a community based on a traditional model or its modern transformation into a modern and placeless bedroom community of Drummondville and Trois-Rivieres. Adjacent to the church question was always the issue of opening new lands for suburban development and improving urban infrastructure that would attract new residents, the double consequence of which would compromise Old Stock's demographic weight and thus their ability to retain the character of their village. Pro-development forces instrumentalised secularist and fiscal discourses, which often work in concert, to mobilise typically disinterested Newcomers to mount a successful social movement against the church, which resulted in its demolition and called into question the very existence of the municipality's independent existence, which ironically was

what allowed it to remain a tax haven and attract suburbanites. The question of Saint-Edmond's church was civil in nature but was resolved politically.

I. Policy Recommendations: What Conflictual Churches Can Teach Each Domain About Themselves

What kind of general significance do these experiences of conflict in each of the church closure domains have for regulating Quebec's ongoing and accelerating phenomenon of church closure, which has now infiltrated the Nation's churches from the least to the greatest? I suggest that conflictual cases publicly express what indifferent and consensual closures cannot and, perhaps, dare not: the angst of moving from one social order to another: from an age of certainty, even if vicarious, to one of indefinite incertitude. Policy should be inspired by trying, at all costs, to use religious heritage to inspire confidence in the national project in a delicate, contextual, and socially appropriate manner.

1. Religious sphere:

As the sharp decline in religious practice changes the Church's needs and diminishing resources reduces its abilities to straddle the socioreligious configurations of the past and present as it did from 1960 to 1998, there will inevitably be more turf wars between churches. Barring any significant change to the religious heritage landscape, these will be battles waged for survival between old churches, replete with secular cultural significance, and their newer and smaller counterparts, which offer practicing Catholics inward-oriented religious refuges from the vagaries of contemporary hyper-secularism. Cities across Quebec, doted with options and thus saddled with painful decisions will have to consider Rimouski's experience and try to alienate as few sympathetic Catholics as possible. That means considering both traditionalist and modernist Catholics, as well as their non-practising brethren, who nevertheless continue to identify with the

faith or at least retain its legacy as an important aspect of their identities. As the Church de-territorialises, it will need cathedrals less to reinforce geographic and social hierarchies and so governments and the Church will need to devise creative ways to avoid sparking what we have seen can pose an extremely flammable social situation where these institutions continue to fuel a powerful matrix of religious and cultural identification, which are still at least a generation away from mutual exclusion in conflictual communities.

From a pastoral point of view, cathedrals continue to provide an important tool for evangelisation. Not only do they support cultural Catholicism, but they are also important zones for non-believers to encounter the divine. Hordes of tourists spontaneously visit Rimouski's cathedral every summer as they stroll along the Saint-Lawrence belvedere, offering the Church unexpected contact with diverse groups. Battening down the hatches and focussing Church infrastructure on only practising Catholics is pastorally myopic and there should be more appreciation paid to the way cathedrals' magnificence can reach people's spirits. But Mgr. Héroux of Nicolet demonstrates that this posture is not shared by all clergy.

2. Political sphere:

Saint-Jean-Baptiste's closure raised the question of an appropriate State role directly to political authorities. Endless subsidies from all levels of government were not enough to save the masterpiece basilica, which dominates the skyline of the national capital. It was too big and important to fail, but it was also too big to be religiously viable. Massive undertakings like the management of a national monument need a permanent solution. It was the State that classed Saint-Jean-Baptiste as an integral part of its national heritage, regulated its potential uses, and restricted transformations. Logically, it should likewise take full responsibility for the site, which produces secular national meaning on the State's behalf. Saint-Jean-Baptiste demonstrates the absurdity of

Quebec's religious heritage system, and its decade-long abandonment should be enough to justify reconsidering nationalising the most important churches and allowing religious practice to continue inside them, considering the dramatic transformation of their interiors is theoretically off-limits. Quebec's notion that municipalities should run and own the Nation's biggest naves is an insufficient response. As seen with the breakdown of the Porter Commission, cities view taking on the responsibility as doing dioceses a favour and should benefit from the transactions by freely acquiring other lucrative church properties at no cost, whereas dioceses resent the lack of recognition cities have for their half-century-long financial and existential odyssey of managing these assets on behalf of the non-practising public. Only a national response can structure the transition and avoid the extreme variability of sensibilities across municipal and diocesan administrations. The nation-binding qualities of Quebec's basilicas flow from their centrally regulated functions and significations that extend across its territory. What happens to their cultural value when that coherence cannot even be maintained within a single example?

3. Civil Society

In the context of dramatic social changes, culture has a hard time keeping abreast and sometimes its role is to counter its most nefarious alienating effects. One could argue this is one of religious heritage's principal functions, to reinforce collective identity as a counterweight to change by producing countervailing meaning-making sources of continuity with the past. Not only just a physical symbol of identity either, Edmondois lost their *raison d'être* as a traditional hold out in a sea of placeless modern suburbs, like those mushrooming around all of Quebec's urban centres. Old Stock residents felt like Newcomers swept in and pulled the rug out from under them in their own home.

Their experience raises the question of how Quebecers can maintain their welcoming nature without being subsumed by outside sensibilities, and not just in its traditional villages. Saint-Edmond-de-Grantham's experience of usurpation should warn Quebecers what can happen when long-cherished values and ways of living can be cast off when subjected to the changing winds of democracy. On the other hand, Saint-Edmond-de-Grantham's demolition should also teach communities about the dangers of insularity. Municipal ownership, if one looks to Saint-Edmond-de-Grantham, is obviously insufficient in a contemporary world axed on mobility, growth, and diversification, which are all anathema to cultural stability.

I argue that the lessons gleaned from each of these painful experiences have social implications. Whether on the national, regional, or local level, Quebec's churches have not yet had their last word in the religious, civil society, or political spheres.

J. Methodological Choices and Results

Without systematic consideration, Quebec's church closures are merely a series of sad episodes demonstrating that time marches on its merry way and little more. I based these categories on media responses I archived to create my inventory of 650 Catholic church closures in Quebec since the 1960s when the government started closing rural villages up till the present. The most sociologically intriguing cases were those where church closure erupted in social conflict. It was clear these were the examples I had to study for their richness and range. Conflictual closures need at least two of the three social domains to be represented by participants in social closure, but usually all three are present in some capacity. They are examples of contestation over the destiny of institutions that matter to their milieus and where multiple ideal outcomes competed with one another. It is vital to remember that conflictual closures are not the product of caprice, although it often enters the equation, but rather, I see them as a reflection of a point on a spectrum of

socioreligious configuration undergoing the process of change. I posit that conflictual closures point to churches in communities which no longer remain in the vicarious religion configuration, but which are not fully exculturated and as a result must negotiate their church's social meaning and public role.

I noticed that within each domain, two groups emerged, opposed to one another. Actors from one domain would have more in common with actors from the other two domains than would their counterparts within the same sphere with respect to their position on the closure. Traditionalist Catholics allied themselves with Grassroots civil society as well as Open secularist politicians as opposed to other practising Modernist Catholics, Institutional civil society, and Strict secularist politicians. A clear question divided each community: two options were available within each sphere, although their justifications differed from case to case, the pro and anti church poles reflected two stable approaches to religious heritage: idealistic vs. pragmatic. These two overarching tendencies are competing responses to a shared context of rapid socioreligious transformation of Quebec society.

1. Progressive secularisation

When Catholic churches started to shutter *en masse* across Quebec, marking the entry into a new socioreligious configuration, which I have suggested could be described as patrimonialised religion, religion as heritage, or referential religion. All the subjects I spoke with had gone through the old school system and identified with the notion of religion as an historical marker of identity, which, along with churches, they generally viewed positively; the same was often not true for the contemporary Church as an institution. Whereas cultural Catholics retained a certain credible Catholic mentality, patrimonial Catholics, as their heirs, orient their affiliation more around historical French-Canadian exceptionalism and value the architectural, artistic, historical and

social traces their ancestors' Catholicism has left behind, which distinguishes them from their North American neighbours. Now that cultural Catholicism is empirically disappearing, perhaps religious heritage offers the cultural vicarity, practicing Catholics once provided for their believing but not belonging co-religionaries. For now, religion as heritage can dull the shock of the dawn of a new Quebec religious regime characterised more by official secularism than the Church.

Why will patrimonialised religion likely be temporary? The young people I spoke with informally did not seem to know enough about Quebec's religious past, apart from the Great Darkness mythology¹³⁶⁰, to base an identity upon religious heritage. It will be interesting to see if that changes as they age, or if their lack of religious socialisation could render patrimonialised religion unintelligible to all but a small intellectual minority and of little sociological significance.

2. Modern Trajectories

Until churches close, their multiple significations can coexist peacefully, and ideally, reinforce one another. Practising Catholics, Modernist and Traditionalist alike can find in them an anchorage for their beliefs and cultural Catholics can look to them as repositories of their symbolic universe. Danièle Hervieu-Léger argues that until recently churches were intended to contain and balance this diversity, but that declining clerical authority paired with growing individualism have been steadily eroding their capacity to perform this role. Even within the Church, we have seen evidence of this decentring, as movements pull some Catholics towards fundamentalist movements, such as *Opus Dei*, the Society of Pope Pius X, and the Neocatechumenal Way, while other progressive movements, advocating women's ordinations or same-sex union blessings, push for reforms

¹³⁶⁰ See Bouchard, Gérard. « L'imaginaire de la grande noirceur et de la révolution tranquille : fictions identitaires et jeux de mémoire au Québec. » *Recherches sociographiques*, 46(3), septembre-décembre 2005, p. 411-436.

irreconcilable with the formers' worldviews¹³⁶¹. While toleration of these movements is supposed to act as a way to maintain unity, their growth reflects an increasingly hollow centre. Is something similar happening with church closures across Quebec? That is a question for the Sociology of Catholicism to confirm as the phenomenon intensifies. And this is perhaps the most relevant socio-historical interpretation for understanding what, sociologically - both nationally and structurally - is at stake here in the closure of churches. Something like the *disappearance of the centre*, of the middle ground, where culture and faith once supported each other in a harmonious and fruitful relationship¹³⁶².

Hervieu-Léger argues that there are two sets of polarisations, universal ethics versus community value, and emotion versus culture, which tend to produce two different Catholic mentalities. The first type of "modern religious trajectories", as she calls them, produces an individualistic Catholic driven by emotion and universal ethical ideals. The second type, collectivist in nature, seeks to reify culture and identity by prioritising community values¹³⁶³. The first type corresponds with modernist Catholics, whose religious life is more forward-looking and oriented around religious practice, while the second clearly corresponds to the cultural Catholic configuration. Viewed from a different angle, the first type describes the religious orientation of Catholics who have renounced their religion's public cultural role, while the second traces the contour of what Grace Davie calls vicarious religion. Whereas for the first type, churches are principally infrastructure for religious practice, which for them is the paramount aspect of religious belonging, the communitarian model

¹³⁶¹ See among others Raison Yann du Cleuziou, « La transition minoritaire du catholicisme français », *Études*, May 5, 2025. p.85-95.

¹³⁶² See the outstanding essay from the sociologist Olivier Roy, *La Sainte ignorance*. Le temps de la religion sans culture, Paris, Le Seuil, 2008.

¹³⁶³ See Danièle Hervieu-Léger, *Le Pèlerin et le converti : La religion en mouvement*, Paris, Flammarion, 1999p. 82, original : « Les deux lignes de fuite qui correspondent à deux modes de 'sortie de la religion' : par enfermement communautaire d'une part, par universalisation éthique d'autre part ».

allows wider culture to see itself in churches, even for members who do not regularly practise their religion in the sense that they are repositories of culture and psychosocial utilities. One trajectory leads to believe without tradition and the other to tradition without belief. But of course, empirically, church closures are much more complicated than what theory can suggest.

3. Vicarious religion

Grace Davie formulates vicarious religion as a form of belonging where the majority rarely practices religion but depends on a minority to do so on their behalf. Churches play a vital role as cosmic utilities that can be called to mark rites of passage, and as places to attend to individual and collective spiritual needs such as moments of joy and sorrow. Think of Saint-Germain-de-Rimouski's ecclesiastical role representing the Lower Saint-Lawrence's autonomy from the rest of Québec, the sadness expressed by many Saint-Jean-Baptiste parishioners at not being able to hold their funerals there or Saint-Edmond's central role in celebrating community events such as anniversaries or its pilgrimage. The attraction of these functions exceeds the restrained circle who used those churches on a regular basis to fulfil their dominical obligations. People are comforted knowing churches are there just in case and that, at any given moment, they are being used for sacred purposes. Those uses are considered by people who subscribe to a vicarious configuration as part of culture and depend on an alliance between cultural and practising Catholics; the former depends on the prayers of the latter, and the latter depends on the financial support of the former. But, without considerable financial support of non-practising Catholics, the system breaks down and practising Catholics eventually resent the impossible burden of supporting a national infrastructure on their own, leading to exculturation.

4. Exculturation

Whereas vicarious religion is a mechanism, exculturation is a progressive process. To visualise the process, imagine two concentric circles with one representing culture and the other religion. The shared portion in the centre represents religious culture – religion's ambient (widely shared and acknowledged) presence in secular society; think of popular religious practices, religious references in popular culture, cultural expressions, feast day celebrations, taboos, proscriptions, social conventions, etc. As religious socialisation declines, these become less accessible or desirable among large swathes of the population and the shared portion shrinks. The circles of religion and culture pull apart until they eventually are mutually exclusive. Once autonomous, religion no longer needs to attenuate its dogma to accommodate culture, and culture is liberated from religion's normative restrictions.

The situation this process installs suits some constituencies just fine. Strict secularists and modernist Catholics are happy to mutually exclude from one another. Consider, for example, Cardinal Turcotte's apprehension of soliciting too wide a swathe of non-practising Catholics in his 1995-1998 General Synod on the future of the archdiocese's churches or Rimouski's observant Catholics dismayed by the unprecedented participation in its parish council elections in 2017 and 2018, something previous vintages of believers might have seen as a renewal¹³⁶⁴. Likewise, strict secularists saw the removal of catechism from schools as a seminal victory in their project of separation Church from State. Consequently, practising Catholics have assumed a subcultural identity, while wider society has been individualised without an established shared set of values and societal norms. For practising Catholics, like those in Rimouski and Quebec, the survival of their congregations depended on shedding their public responsibilities for heritage, whereas the

individualist grassroots civil society in Saint-Edmond-de-Grantham, felt the same way about the cost of maintaining community infrastructure. Strict secularist politicians behave in the same way when they advocate removing traditional Catholic symbols and practices like the crucifix and prayer from legislatures and council chambers and by refusing to support religious heritage initiatives.

But just because the two mentalities are being pulled apart by secularising forces (modernisation, individualisation, and privatisation), does not mean that others are not trying to brace against polarisation's pull. Religious heritage advocates, like traditionalist Catholics, open secularist politicians, (most often) grassroots civil society and their institutional counterparts work in different ways to try to preserve the shared territory between culture and religion, notably as heritage, which transforms cultural Catholicism into something suited to a less credulous society. Unwilling to abandon their religious heritage, these participants were clear about the myriad important roles of churches for contemporary Quebec society. Chief among these was to preserve a distinct national identity, to maintain continuity with their family lineages, to honour artistic achievements made possible by collective sacrifice, and community networks rooted in social solidarity and charity. None of these dimensions are entirely evacuated of the religious dimension and all of them are accented with a shared ethnic experience and the desire to preserve its legacy. These actors are torn between two poles. Meanwhile, clergy and Modernist Catholics are abandoning their spiritual role in underpinning a secular culture, on the one hand, and strict secularist politicians are eschewing their role in asserting a Catholic identity in the public sphere on the other. “

5. Religious Privatisation and Social Closure

Part of what made cultural Catholicism such an enduring socioreligious configuration was that it demanded little and was generous in who it benefited. The tacit nature of its belonging made it malleable, but three decades of exculturation has stretched its vicarious capacity to its limits. The gradual exculturation of the Catholic religion from Quebec culture took place relatively smoothly over several decades. Institutional secularisation took place without significantly altering Quebec's cultural Catholicism. But there came a time when this function of vicarious unity, conferred to the Catholic churches, became obsolete, not to say unacceptable, given the religious reality of Quebec society. Successive waves of closures have forced communities and Quebec society as a whole to evaluate its cultural and religious associations with the Catholic Church.

The ongoing process of exculturation has changed the ways Quebeckers belonged within a vicarious socioreligious regime, which was characterised by compartmentalisation and ambivalence in relation to the Church's legacy as an institution and its presence on the ground as a social actor and custodian of an ethnic national identity. No longer willing or able to act as a repository for a large portion of the Nation's culture and traditions, the Church made the conscious decision to test public commitment and interest in 1998 to see whether or not to abdicate its public role and to shift its resources towards its practising members and their pastoral priorities; since then it is increasingly privatised.¹³⁶⁵

During the cultural Catholicism configuration, the Church functioned as a bulwark marking out who belonged to the Nation. Because of universal religious socialisation, it reproduced itself organically, binding people across regions and generations. It was an effective process of social

¹³⁶⁵ To look at the incarnation of this vicarious function in Québec case, see works of Raymond Lemieux; works of E.-Martin Meunier; already quoted.

closure endowed with a complex super and infrastructure. As exculturation compromised the system by repelling religion and secular culture from one another, the Church, which straddled the religious and cultural spheres, was left in the middle responding to neither the needs of practising Catholics nor the de-Christianising and disaffiliating secular world. Practising Catholics were no longer willing vicars.

This initiated a new and different process of social closure, where modernist Catholics, adopting a congregational model, were no longer willing to cater to wider society and demanded greater virtuosity, removing religion's institutional support to the Nation's symbolic repertoire. The consequence of this separation is hundreds of orphaned churches that lost their national function. Participants in conflictual church closures do not accept this act of social closure and engage in what Parkin calls « usurpation practices »¹³⁶⁶ in the religious, civil society, and political spheres. They do this by self-consciously contesting ex-cultural forces by creating religious heritage through actively claiming churches as part of wider culture. The goal seems to be to retain cultural Catholicism's capacity for symbolic social closure, as a buttress against ethnic and religious diversification of the public sphere, to claim public spaces on behalf of secularised ethnic French-Canadians and to conserve their culture as the common culture for a society that is nonetheless open and pluralistic.

6. Patrimonialised Religion: A new configuration?

Whereas religion, civil society, and politics were default linked to the Nation via the Church in a cultural Catholicism context, religious heritage requires self-conscious articulation, reflecting the passage to a new configuration where Catholicism's place in Quebec society is no longer self-

¹³⁶⁶ See Jürgen Mackert, *On Social Closure: Theorising Exclusion, Exploitation, and Elimination*, New York, , Oxford University Press, 2024.

evident. The benefits the religious heritage movement seeks to conserve are, viewed through the prism of social closure, the privileged position of the French-Canadian ethnicity and its coherent expression, which the Church performed so expertly from 1840 with the rise of a French-Canadian national consciousness until recently. This is not an example of social closure where actors are covetously seeking to replace the church, or jealous of its temporal power.

Participants in church closure generally intervene reluctantly in order to conserve the social benefits the Church is no longer interested in providing. On a superficial level, it could be viewed as reverse closure in the way that in Rimouski the Church rejected its right to benefit from the cathedral. In Quebec City the municipality tried until the eleventh hour to avoid shouldering the responsibility for religious heritage. Lastly, in Saint-Edmond-de-Grantham, New Arrivals threw off what they perceived more as a limitation for their future than a resource. We must therefore consider that what we are witnessing across Quebec is more than a massive wave of secularisation, and that church closures could also reveal a weakening of the Nation's cultural foundations (or what remains of them) - religion being just one of many forms of belonging subject to polarisation. Examined under this light, could patrimonialised religion likewise form a part of a broader resistance to wider exculturating forces? The success of the new configuration, whatever it will look like, will depend on how religious heritage is framed and on Quebecers' willingness to resolve their long-held ambivalence towards their religious past. By conceptually separating churches from the Church while somehow maintaining a Durkheimian dimension of the socially sacred, it could be possible that religious heritage will continue to perform a nationally mobilising force for a society seeking to retain authentic forms of distinction, something which requires positive, yet firm, social boundaries. The question that religious heritage poses to Quebec is whether or not traditional modes of belonging can be renovated for another generation in

meaningful ways in the context of a dramatically changing social landscape. Quebec society has struggled to make sense of and respond to church closures initiated by the Catholic Church's retreat to the private sphere. Given the difficulty of finding a satisfactory replacement model for the Church's capacity for social enclosure, something which has so far only been imperfectly and clumsily achieved by the concerted action of the religious, civil society, and political spheres, it is only when churches disappear that Quebeckers recognise the Church's effective performance as a social institution, which, even after decades of neglect, continued to make existentially important religious, community and national contributions to Quebec Society and French-Canadians' place in it. Churches are the homes of God, but they are also infrastructure of communities. Each time one closes, Quebec society loses space to express itself in its unique fashion, regardless of orthodoxy and ideology. Conflict sparked by Quebec's church closures demonstrates something which, so far, other studies have neglected to underscore. Quebec's churches have been thoroughly studied for their architectural, historic, and urbanist qualities, but what Saint-Germain, Saint-Jean-Baptiste, and Saint-Edmond-de-Grantham's experiences of closure show us is that in Quebec churches are much more than inert physical objects. They are material traces of the Catholic Church's symbolic strength and weight, ramparts against the collective amnesia, texts that recall a civilisational project which church closures bring to the fore for debate as Quebec society and French Canadians wrestle with its contemporary role, significance and most importantly, pertinence.

X. Bibliography

Scholarly Sources:

Alexander, Jeffrey C., *Performance and Power*, Cambridge, Polity Press, 2011.

Audet, Olivier, « Le tournant conservateur du nationalisme québécois : laïcité identitaire, populisme et construction d'une majorité 'catholico-laïque,' » master's thesis, Université du Québec à Montréal, 2023, <https://archipel.uqam.ca/16921/1/M18185.pdf>.

Baum, Gregory, *Fernand Dumont: A Sociologist Turns to Theology*, McGill-Queen's University Press, 2015.

Béraud, Céline, & Philippe Portier, *Métamorphoses catholiques*, Paris, Éditions de la maison des sciences de l'homme, 2015.

Berger, Peter L., *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory*, New York, Doubleday, 1967.

Bernier, Lyne, « Les églises et les bâtiments à caractère religieux de Montréal : de la francisation à la patrimonialisation », volume 4, doctoral dissertation, Université de Bretagne occidentale-Brest, 2015.

Boholm, Åsa, "Reinvented Histories: Medieval Rome as Memorial Landscape", *Ecumene*, 4(3), 1997, p. 247-272.

Bouchard, Gérard & Charles Taylor, *Building the Future: A time for reconciliation*, Government of Quebec, 2008.

Bouchard, Gérard, *Genèse des nations et cultures du nouveau monde*, Montréal, Boréal, 2000.

Bourdieu, Pierre, « Genèse et structure du champ religieux ». *Revue française de Sociologie*, 12, 1971, p. 295–334.

Brunet, Michel, « Trois dominantes de la pensée canadienne-française : l'agriculturisme, l'antiétatisme et le messianisme », dans *La Présence anglaise et les Canadiens*, Montreal, Beauchemin, 1958, p. 112-166.

Charbonneau, André & Marc Vallières, *Histoire de Québec et de sa région*, Quebec City, Les Presses de l'Université Laval, 2008.

Connerton, Paul, *How Societies Remember*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1989.

Cox, Harvey, *The Secular City: Secularization and Urbanization in Theological Perspective*, New York, Collier Books, 1965.

Cuchet, Guillaume, *Comment notre monde a cessé d'être chrétien : Anatomie d'un effondrement*, Paris, Le Seuil, 2018.

Davie, Grace "Believing without belonging: is this the future of religion in Britain?", *Social compass*, 37(4), 1990, p. 455-469.

Davie, Grace, "From believing without belonging to vicarious religion", in Daniel V.A. Olson & Detlef Pollack (dirs.), *The Role of Religion in Modern Societies*, 2008.

Davie, Grace, *Religion in modern Europe: a memory mutates*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2000.

Des Rochers, Jacques, « Nouvelles vocations et conversions : les biens religieux et la société civile québécoise au tournant du XXI^e siècle », *Perspective*, Vol. 3, 2008, p. 571-578, <http://journals.openedition.org/perspective/3310> ; DOI : <https://doi.org/10.4000/perspective.3310>.

Dufaux, François, « Reconnaître la spiritualité des valeurs immatérielles dans l'acte débâter le patrimoine religieux du Québec », *Études d'histoire religieuse*, 78(2), 2012, p. 5-24.

Dumont, Fernand, *L'Église du Québec, un héritage, un projet*. Rapport-synthèse, instruments de travail, Montréal, Fides, 1971, 6 tomes.

Dumont, Fernand, *Genèse de la société québécoise*, Montréal, Boréal, 1993.

Durkheim, Emile, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, Translated by Joseph Ward Swain, 1954.

Foisy-Geoffroy, Dominique « *Essais sur une sensibilité historique, note critique* » *Historical Studies*, 70, 2004, p. 107-112.

Franco, Frida, *Inoubliable Saint-Jean-Baptiste*, Quebec City, Septentrion, 2020.

Fraser, Pierre « Requiem pour un église », *Photo-Société*, 2017, (web), consulted, August 25, 2022, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iOR_NTRI2cg&ab_channel=PhotoSoci%C3%A9t%C3%A9

Gauthier, Richard, « Le devenir de l'art de l'Église des paroisses catholiques au Québec : Architecture, arts, pratiques, patrimoine », doctoral dissertation, , l'Université Laval, 2005.

Gauvreau, Michael, *The Catholic Origins of Québec's Quiet Revolution, 1931-1970* Montreal & Kingston, McGill-Queen's University Press, 2006.

Grand'Maison, Jacques, *Nationalisme et religion, tome 2 Nationalisme et révolution culturelle*, Montreal, Beauchemin, 1970.

Halbwachs, Maurice, *Les cadres sociaux de la mémoire*, Paris, Presses Universitaires de France, 1925.

Harvey, Fernand, « La production du patrimoine », in Andrée Fortin (dir.), *Produire la culture, produire l'identité?*, Quebec City, Les Presses de l'Université Laval p. 3-16.

Hastings Nichols, James, *History of Christianity, 1650-1950: Secularization of the West*, New York, Ronald Press, Inc., 1956.

Hervieu-Léger, Danièle, « La démocratie providentielle, temps de l'ultra-modernité », *Revue européenne des sciences sociales*, XLIV-135, août 2006, p. 111-121.

Hervieu-Léger, Danièle, « Productions religieuses de la modernité: les phénomènes du croire dans les sociétés modernes », in Brigitte Caulier (dir.), *Religion, sécularisation, modernité : les expériences francophones en Amérique du Nord*, Quebec City, Les Presses de l'Université Laval, 1996, p. 37-58.

Hervieu-Léger, Danièle, *Le Pèlerin et le converti : La religion en mouvement*, Paris, Flammarion, 1999.

Harvey, David C., "The History of Heritage", in Brian Graham and Peter Howard (dirs.), *The Ashgate Research Companion to Heritage and Identity*, Farnham, U.K., Ashgate Publishing Ltd., 2008, p. 19-36.

Hervieu-Léger, Danièle, *Religion as a Chain of Memory*, Simon Lee (translator), New Brunswick, New Jersey, Rutgers University Press, 2000.

Hervieu-Léger, Danièle, *Catholicisme : La fin d'un monde*, Paris, Bayard, 2003.

Hughes, Everett, *French Canada in Transition*, Chicago, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1945.

Laniel, Jean-François, « Il était une foi des bâtisseurs-- : vers une synthèse socio-historique du Catholicisme et du nationalisme québécois en modernité (1840-2015) », doctoral dissertation, Université du Québec à Montréal, 2018.

Lebeuf, Pierre, « Le mouvement laïque : deux ans après », *Liberté*, 5(30), May-June, 1963, p. 179-183.

Lefebvre, Marcel, *Le synode diocésain de Montréal 1995-1998, La dernière étape : l'Assemblée synodale (24-25 octobre et 28-29 novembre 1998)*, Montréal, Fides, 1999.

Lefebvre, Solange (dir.), *La religion dans la sphère publique*, Montreal, Presses de l'Université de Montréal, 2005.

Lefebvre, Solange (dir.), *Le Patrimoine religieux du Québec. Éducation et transmission du sens*, Quebec City, Les Presses de l'Université Laval, 2009.

Lefebvre, Solange, « La religion dans la sphère publique : sécularité ou laïcité? », in E.-Martin Meunier (dir.), *Le Québec et ses mutations culturelles : Six enjeux pour le devenir d'une société*, Ottawa, Les Presses de l'Université d'Ottawa, 2016, p. 484-488.

Lefebvre, Solange, *et al.*, "Changes in religious education in response to growing diversity: a comparison of Brazil, Canada and England" *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 46(5), 2025, p.1-21.

Lemieux, Raymond, « Le Catholicisme québécois : une question de culture », *Sociologie et sociétés*, 22(2), 1990, p. 145-164

Lowenthal, David, *The Heritage Crusade and the Spoils of History*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1998.

Luckmann, Thomas, *The Invisible Religion: The Problem of Religion in America*, New York, Macmillan, 1967.

Mackert, Jürgen, *On Social Closure: Theorising Exclusion, Exploitation, and Elimination*, New York, Oxford University Press, 2024.

Maisonneuve, Pierre, Jean-Claude Turcotte, *L'homme derrière le cardinal L'homme derrière le cardinal*, Montreal, Novalis, 1998.

Martin, David, "Canada in Comparative Perspective", in David Lyon & Marguerite Van Die (dirs.) *Re-thinking Church, State and Modernity: Canada Between Europe and America*, Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 2000, p. 23-33.

Martin, David, *On Secularization: Towards a Revised General Theory*, Farnham, U.K., Ashgate, 2005.

Martin, David *A General Theory of Secularization*, Oxford, Basil-Blackwell, 1978.

Mauss, Marcel, « Essai sur le don forme et raison de l'échange dans les sociétés archaïques », *L'Année sociologique*, 1, 1925, p. 30-186.

Mauss, Marcel, *The Gift: The Form and Functions of Exchange in Archaic Societies*. London, Cohen & West, 1966, p. 76-77.

Max Weber, *The Protestant Work Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, translated by Talcott Parsons & Anthony Giddens, New York, Scribners, 1930.

McLuhan, Marshall *Understanding Media: Extensions of Man*, New York, McGraw-Hill, 1964.

Meunier, E.-Martin & Jacob Legault-Leclair, "Nones and Catholics in Québec: The Social Reconfiguration of Bill 21", *Secular Studies*, 3, 2021, p. 93-117.

Meunier, E.-Martin, Jean-François Laniel & Jean-Christophe Demers. « Permanence et recomposition de la religion culturelle. Aperçu socio-historique du Catholicisme québécois (1970-2005), in Robert Mager & Serge Cantin (dirs.), *Religion et modernité au Québec*, 2010, p. 79-128.

Meunier, E.-Martin & Jean-Philippe Warren, « La question sociale à la question nationale: la revue Cité Libre (1950-1963) », *Recherches sociographiques*, 39(2-3), 1998, p. 291-316.

Meunier, E.-Martin & Jean-Philippe Warren, *Sortir de la « Grande noirceur », L'horizon « personnaliste » de la Révolution tranquille*, Quebec City, Les Éditions du Septentrion, 2002.

Meunier, E.-Martin & Sarah Wilkins-Laflamme, « Sécularisation, Catholicisme et transformation du régime de religiosité au Québec. Étude comparative avec le Catholicisme au Canada (1968-2007) », *Recherches Sociographiques*, 52(3), 2011, p. 683-729, <https://www.erudit.org/fr/revues/rs/2011-v52-n3-rs5005802/1007655ar.pdf>.

Meunier, E.-Martin, « L’ancrage du Catholicisme au Québec et sa déliaison progressive : une sociologie historique de l’exculturation », in Solange Lefebvre, Céline Béraud & É.-Martin Meunier (dirs.), *Catholicisme et cultures. Regards croisés Québec-France*, Quebec City, Les Presses de l’Université Laval et Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2015, p. 21-44.

Meunier, E.-Martin, « L’appartenance catholique des Québécois et son double », in V. Aubourg, D. Meintel, O. Servais (dirs.), *Ethnographie du Catholicisme contemporain*. Karthala. Chapter 10.

Meunier, E.-Martin & François Olivier Dorais, « Nous sommes devant un changement devant la Continuité », *L’Action Nationale*, May 2019, (web), consulted August 26, 2025, <https://action-nationale.qc.ca/pl21-nous-sommes-devant-un-changement-dans-la-continuite/>.

Meunier, E.-Martin, « Une nouvelle sensibilité pour les Enfants du Concile », dans Stéphane Kelly (dir.), *Les idées mènent le Québec. Essais sur une sensibilité historique*, Quebec City, Les Presses de l’Université Laval, 2003,

Meunier, E.-Martin, *Le Pari personnaliste*, Montreal, Fides, 2007.

Mimeault, Mario, « La grande église des Rimouskois : genèse, enjeux et mise en œuvre d’un projet collectif », in Jean-René Thuot, Kurt Vignola & Nicolas Beaudry (dirs.), *La cathédrale de Rimouski. Parcours, mémoires, récits*, Rimouski, L’Estuaire, 2016, p. 23-52.

Morisset, Gérard, « Les arts au Canada sous le régime Français », *Société Historique du Canada. Rapport Annuel*, 1948, p. 23-27, (web), consulted February 28, 2025, <https://rd.uqam.ca/Morisset/1948b.html>.

Murphy, Raymond, *Social Closure: The Theory of Monopolization and Exclusion*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1988.

Noppen, Luc & Lucie K. Morisset, *Quel Avenir pour Quelles Églises*, Quebec City, Presses de l’Université du Québec, 2006.

Noppen, Luc et Lucie K. Morisset, « L’avenir des églises du Québec : contours et enjeux », in Turgeon, Laurier (dir.), *La patrimoine religieux du Québec: entre le cultuel et le culturel*, Québec City, Les Presses de l’Université Laval, 2005.

Noppen, Luc et Lucie K. Morisset, *Art et architecture des églises à Québec*, Québec, Les Publications du Québec, 1996.

Noppen, Luc, « Essai sur la patrimonialité de la cathédrale Saint-Germain de Rimouski », in (dirs.) Jean-René Thuot, Kurt Vignola and Nicolas Beaudry *La cathédrale de Rimouski : Parcours, mémoires, récits*, L’Estuaire, 2016, p. 319-382.

Noppen, Luc, Lucie K. Morisset & Robert Caron (dirs.), *La conservation des églises dans les villes-centres*, Québec City, Les Éditions Septentrion, 1997.

Otto, Rudolf, *The Idea of the Holy*, translated by John W. Harvey, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1923

Palard, Jacques, *Dieu a changé au Québec: Regards sur un Catholicisme à l'épreuve du politique*, Quebec City, Les Presses de l'Université Laval, 2010.

Parkin, Frank, *Marxism and Class Theory: A Bourgeois Critique*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1979.

Ronald Wilson, Bryan, *Religion in a Secular Society*, London, C.A. Watts, 1966.

Rousseau, Louis, « La Construction Religieuse de la Nation », *Recherches Sociographiques*, 46(3), September-December 2006, p. 437-452.

Routhier, Gilles, *L'Eglise Canadienne et Vatican II*, Montreal, Fides, 1997.

Roy, Martin, « Le programme laïciste de la revue de gauche Parti pris (1963-1968) », *Bulletin d'histoire politique*, 22(3), 2014, p. 205-228.

Roy, Olivier, *La sainte ignorance : le temps de la religion sans culture*, Paris, Éditions Seuil, 2007.

Ryan, Claude, « Le Rapport Proulx et l'avenir de la dimension religieuse dans le système scolaire du Québec », *Revue générale de droit*, 30(2), 1999, p. 217-238.

Saint-Pierre, Michel L., « L'apport des travaux de 1967 à l'architecture de la cathédrale Saint-Germain », in, Jean-René Thuot, Kurt Vignola and Nicolas Beaudry (dirs.), *La cathédrale de Rimouski : Parcours, mémoires, récits*, L'Estuaire, 2016, p. 167-180.

Seitz, John C., *No Closure: Catholic Practice and Boston's Parish Shutdowns*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 2011.

Sengers, Erik, "The concept of 'church' in sociology and global society: genealogy of a word and transformation of a position", *International Journal for the Study of the Christian Church*, (12), 1, February 2012, p. 55-70.

Stéphane Kelly (dir.), *Les idées mènent le Québec : essais sur une sensibilité historique*, Quebec City, Les Presses de l'Université Laval, 2003.

Swatos, William H., & Kevin J. Christiano, "Secularization Theory: The Course of a Concept", *The Sociology of religion*, 60(3), 1999, p. 209-228.

Thiessen, Joel & Sarah Wilkins-Laflamme, "Becoming a Religious None: Irreligious Socialization and Disaffiliation", *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 56(1), 2017, p. 64-82.

Thuot, Jean-René, Kurt Vignola, & Nicolas Beaudry (dirs.), *La cathédrale de Rimouski : Parcours, mémoires, récits*, Rimouski, L'Estuaire, 2017.

Tilly, Charles, "From interactions to outcomes in social movements", *How Social Movements Matter*, 10, 1999, 253-270.

Tomasi, Nathalie, « La Fondation du patrimoine religieux », *Le Patrimoine religieux du monde rural*, Université du Québec à Trois-Rivières, Département des sciences humaines, 1999.

Touraine, Alain, *La crise de la modernité*, Paris, Fayard, 1992.

Troeltsch, Ernst, *Protestantism and Progress*, translated by W. Montgomery, Boston, Beacon Press, 1958.

Troeltsch, Ernst, *The Social Teaching of the Christian Churches*, translated by Olive Wyon, London, George Allen and Unwin, 1931.

Turcotte, Paul-André « Éducation catholique et nationalisme dans l'enseignement secondaire québécois », *Social Compass*, 31(4), 1984, p. 365-377.

Turgeon, Laurier (dir.), *Le patrimoine religieux du Québec: entre le cultuel et le culturel*, Quebec City, Les Presses Université Laval, 2005.

Turnbridge, John E. & Gregory J. Ashworth, *Dissonant Heritage: The Management of the Past as a Resource in Conflict*, London, Belhaven, 1996, p. 20.

Velthuis, Kirsten & Dirk H. R. Spennemann, "The Future of Defunct Religious Buildings: Dutch Approaches to Their Adaptive Re-use", *Cultural Trends*, 16(1), 2007, p.43-66.

Venon, Fabien, *Les paroisses au défi de la modernité*, Paris, L'Harmattan, 2013.

Venon, Fabien, *Les paroisses de Montréal en crise : La fin d'un bastion catholique?*, Paris, L'Harmattan, 2012.

Willaime, Jean-Paul, *Europe et religions: les enjeux du XXI^e siècle*, Paris, Fayard, 2001.

Wilson, Bryan, & Olivier Tschannen, "The Secularization Paradigm: A Systematization", *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 30(4), December 1991, p. 410-411.

Wright Mills, Charles, *The Sociological Imagination*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1959.

Yves Couture, *La Terre Promise : L'absolu politique dans le nationalisme québécois*, New York, Liber, 1995.

Zubrzycki, Geneviève, *Beheading the Saint. Nationalism, Religion and Secularism in Québec*, Chicago & London, University of Chicago Press, 2016.

Media Sources:

“1,000 Catholic churches to close in Holland by 2025”, *The Tablet*, December 4, 2013, (web), consulted 13 January 2019, <https://www.thetablet.co.uk/news/170/1-000-catholic-churches-in-holland-to-close-by-2025>.

“Catholic diocese closing 36 churches in Ontario”, *The Globe and Mail*, May 1, 2006, (web), consulted 13 January 2019, <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/national/catholic-diocese-closing-36-churches-in-ontario/article4108777/>.

“Church analysts: twice as many churches as necessary”, *The Copenhagen Post*, February 28, 2012, (web), consulted October 4, 2024, <https://cphpost.dk/2012-02-28/general/church-analysts-twice-as-many-churches-as-necessary/>.

“Closing churches cuts worship numbers, new opinion poll finds”, National Church Trust, August 21, 2024, (web), consulted October 3, 2024, <https://www.nationalchurchestrust.org/news/closing-churches-cuts-worship-numbers-new-opinion-poll-finds#:~:text=Over%20%2C500%20churches%20have%20closed,as%2040%25%20of%20its%20churches>.

“German Catholic Church Faces Significant Drop in Church Tax Revenue for 2023”, *Zenit*, July 11, 2024, (web), consulted October 4, 2024, <https://zenit.org/2024/07/11/german-catholic-church-faces-significant-drop-in-church-tax-revenue-for-2023/>.

« Le Fonds de la ruralité rend heureuses de nombreuses municipalités », *L'Express*, 39(13), September 25, 2011, p.5.

“Nordic churches explore ‘baptism in times of change’”, *Lutheran World*, May 5, 2021, (web), consulted October 4, 2024, <https://lutheranworld.org/news/nordic-churches-explore-baptism-times-change#:~:text=As%20an%20example%2C%20in%20Denmark,Evangelical%20Lutheran%20Church%20in%20Denmark>.

« L’église de discorde », *L'Express*, 45(18), October 16, 2016, p.1.

« ‘On n’a plus de temps à perdre’ – Mgr. Denis Grondin », *L'Avantage, Votre journal*, June 28, 2017, (web), consulted April 8, 2021, <https://www.lavantage.qc.ca/article/2017/06/28/--on-n-a-plus-de-temps-a-perdre-----mgr-denis-grondin>,

« ‘Pour la cathédrale, ce serait tout de suite approuvé!’ – Daniel Thériault », *L'Avantage, Votre journal*, December 30, 2017, (web), consulted April 8, 2021, <https://www.lavantage.qc.ca/article/2017/12/30/--pour-la-cathedrale--ce-serait-tout-de-suite-approuve-----danie>.

« ‘Trois excellents candidats rejetés du revers de la main’ – Jacques Landry », *L'Avantage, Votre journal*, January 4, 2018, (web), consulted April 8, 2021,

<https://www.lavantage.qc.ca/article/2018/01/04/--trois-excellents-candidats-rejetes-du-revers-de-la-main---jac>.

« 200 personnes mobilisées pour l’avenir de la cathédrale à Rimouski », *Ici-Radio-Canada*, June 16, 2019, (web), consulted April 23, 2021, <https://Ici-Radio-Canada.ca/cathedrale-rimouski-manifestation-sauvegarde-eglise-avenir>.

« À Saint-Edmond : Claude McClure veut ramener la paix sociale et gérer sainement », *L’Express*, October 10, 2017, (web), consulted January 5, 2023, <https://www.journalexpress.ca/2017/10/10/a-saint-edmond-claude-mcclure-veut-ramener-la-paix-sociale-et-gerer-sainement/>.

« Après la cathédrale, l’église de Nazareth », *Ici-Radio-Canada – Est du Québec*, April 30, 2015, (web), consulted March 16, 2021, <https://Ici.Radio-Canada.ca/nouvelle/718534/eglise-vente-rimouski>.

« Au tour des citoyens de sauver leur église », *Le Québec Express*, May 20, 2015, (web), consulted 13 January 2019, <https://www.Quebechebdo.com/uncategorized/107296/au-tour-des-citoyens-de-sauver-leur-egli-4153210/>.

« Aucun projet convenable pour la Cathédrale de Rimouski », *L’Avantage, Votre journal*, October 16, 2017, (web), consulted April 8, 2021, <https://www.lavantage.qc.ca/article/2017/10/16/aucun-projet-convenable-pour-la-cathedrale-de-rimouski--selon-la>.

« Connaître l’état de la cathédrale, puis décider rapidement », *L’Avantage, Votre journal*, December 7, 2017, (web), consulted April 8, 2021, https://www.lavantage.qc.ca/article/2017/12/07/connaître-l_etat-de-la-cathedrale--puis-decider-rapidement.

« Coopérative Paradis dans la Cathédrale : ‘Une improvisation irresponsable’ », *L’Avantage, Votre journal*, October 18, 2017, (web), consulted April 8, 2021, <https://www.lavantage.qc.ca/article/2017/10/18/cooperative-paradis-dans-la-cathedrale-----une-improvisation-irr>.

« Dégâts importants à l’église Saint-Jean-Baptiste », *Ici Radio-Canada – Québec*, February 6, 2018, (web), consulted November 2, 2022, <https://Ici.Radio-Canada.ca/nouvelle/1082397/degats-importants-a-leglise-saint-jean-baptiste>.

« Des marguilliers mettent en demeure la Fabrique », *Ici Radio-Canada*, February 16, 2017, (web) consulted April 8, 2021, <https://Ici.Radio-Canada.ca/nouvelle/1017369/marguilliers-mise-en-demeure-fabrique-saint-germain>.

« Deux marguilliers dénoncent leur exclusion du Conseil de Fabrique », *L’Avantage, Votre journal*, February 1, 2017, (web), consulted April 8, 2021, <https://www.lavantage.qc.ca/article/2017/02/01/deux-marguilliers-denoncent-leur-exclusion-du-conseil-de-fabrique>.

« Développement dans le dossier de la Cathédrale de Rimouski », *L'Avantage*, July 11, 2019, (web), consulted November 6, 2024, <https://www.lelaurentien.ca/article/2019/07/11/developpement-dans-le-dossier-de-la-cathedrale-de-rimouski>.

« Emmanuel Macron annonce une ‘collecte pour le patrimoine religieux’, notamment pour les églises anciennes », *Le Monde*, September 15, 2023, (web), consulted October 3, 2024, https://www.lemonde.fr/culture/article/2023/09/15/emmanuel-macron-annonce-une-collecte-pour-le-patrimoine-religieux-notamment-pour-les-eglises-anciennes_6189541_3246.html.

« Fabrique Saint-Germain: un marguillier admis aux assemblées de fabrique », *L'Avantage, Votre journal*, February 24, 2017, (web), consulted April 8, 2021, <https://www.lavantage.qc.ca/article/2017/02/24/fabrique-saint-germain---un-marguillier-admis-aux-assemblees-de-.html>.

« Jacques Landry et cie passent par-dessus la tête de l'évêque », *L'Avantage, Votre journal*, November 29, 2017, (web), consulted April 8, 2021, <http://www.lavantage.qc.ca/actualites/societe/2017/11/29/jacques-landry-et-cie-passent-par-dessus-la-tete-de-leveque.html>.

« L'église Saint-Jean-Baptiste contrainte de fermer », *Ici-Radio-Canada*, February 20, 2015, (web) consulted September 12, 2022, <https://Ici.Radio-Canada.ca/nouvelle/707850/eglise-st-jean-baptiste-fermeture-defIci-Québec>.

« L'église Saint-Jean-Baptiste ouvre pour une première fois en plus de 4 ans », *Ici Radio-Canada – Québec*, September 29, 2019, (web), consulted November 8, 2022, <https://Ici.Radio-Canada.ca/nouvelle/1322859/ouverture-exceptionnelle-eglise-saint-jean-baptiste-Québec>.

« La cathédrale de Rimouski reconnue comme immeuble patrimonial », *Ici Bas Saint-Laurent*, October 31, 2023, (web), consulted November 14, 2024, <https://Ici.Radio-Canada.ca/nouvelle/2022789/cathedrale-saint-germain-rimouski-patrimoine-eglise-protection>.

« Labeaume veut des engagements fédéraux pour la conversion de l'église Saint-Jean-Baptiste », *Ici Radio-Canada – Québec*, October 17, 2019, (web), consulted November 4, 2022, <https://Ici.Radio-Canada.ca/nouvelle/1349773/labeaume-veut-des-engagements-federaux-pour-la-conversion-de-leglise-saint-jean-baptiste>.

« Le clocher de la discorde à Saint-Edmond-de-Grantham », *Ici-Estrie*, September 8, 2016, (web), consulted September 19, 2024, <https://Ici.Radio-Canada.ca/nouvelle/801893/eglise-centre-communautaire-saint-edmond-grantham>.

« Le Diocèse de Rimouski privilégie la conversion de la Cathédrale », *L'Avantage, Votre journal*, June 27, 2017, (web), consulted April 8, 2021, <http://www.lavantage.qc.ca/actualites/2017/6/27/le-diocese-de-rimouski-privilegie-la-coversion-de-la-cathedrale.html>.

« Le dossier de la cathédrale s'en va enfin vers un dénouement », *L'Avantage, Votre journal*, February 15, 2018, (web), consulted April 8, 2021,

<https://www.lavantage.qc.ca/article/2018/02/15/le-dossier-de-la-cathedrale-sen-va-enfin-vers-un-denouement>.

« Le maire de Rimouski met en garde l'Église dans le dossier de la cathédrale », *Radio-Canada*, July 5, 2017, (web), consulted August 6, 2026, <https://Ici.Radio-Canada.ca/nouvelle/1043498/maire-interpelle-eglise-responsabilite-financiere-cathedrale-saint-germain-rimouski>.

« Le purgatoire pour le dernier projet de sauvegarde de la Cathédrale », *Ici Bas-Saint-Laurent*, July 5, 2016, (web), consulted March 16, 2021, <https://Ici.Radio-Canada.ca/nouvelle/791159/cathedrale-projet-sauvegarde-comite-contestation>.

« Le Regroupement diocésain veut recueillir des fonds pour la cathédrale de Rimouski », *Ici Radio-Canada Bas-Saint-Laurent*, August 29, 2019, (web), consulted April 23, 2021, <https://Ici.Radio-Canada.ca/nouvelle/1279204/cathedrale-rimouski-renovation-eglise>.

« Le retrait du crucifix du Salon bleu adopté à l'unanimité », *Ici Radio-Canada*, March 28, 2019, (web), consulted February 28, 2025, <https://ici.radio-canada.ca/nouvelle/1161072/caq-retirer-crucifix-salon-bleu-assemblee-nationale>.

« Le sort de la cathédrale de Rimouski bientôt connu », *Ici Radio-Canada – Bas-Saint-Laurent*, November 28, 2014, (web), consulted March 16, 2021, <https://Ici.Radio-Canada.ca/nouvelle/695940/rimouski-cathedrale-decision-renovation>.

« Les Bessette en concert à Saint-Edmond », *L'Express*, October 15, 2006, p.25.

« Mairie : les deux candidats ont des choses à dire », *L'Express*, 13(33), October 25, 2017, p. 1, 17.

« Les démolitions d'églises », *L'Église sur la place*, *TVA*, 20 January 1973.

« Mgr. Grondin n'est pas prêt », *L'Avantage, Votre journal*, January 24, 2018, (web), consulted April 8, 2021, https://www.lavantage.qc.ca/article/2018/01/24/mgr-grondin-n_est-pas-pret.

« Normand Lavoie, 'écœuré', ne sollicitera pas de nouveau mandat », *L'Avantage, Votre journal*, December 12, 2017, (web), consulted April 8, 2021, <https://www.lavantage.qc.ca/article/2017/12/12/normand-lavoie---ecoeure---ne-sollcitera-pas-de-nouveau-manda>.

« Premier dimanche sans messe à la cathédrale », *Ici Radio-Canada – Bas-Saint-Laurent*, November 30, 2014, (web), consulted March 16, 2021, <https://Ici.Radio-Canada.ca/nouvelle/696161/messe-cathedrale-rimouski-fermee>.

« Prières bannies dans l'espace public: 'C'est trop facile d'interdire', réagit l'ex-maire Tremblay », *Le Journal de Québec*, December 6, 2024, (web), consulted February 28, 2025, <https://www.journaldemontreal.com/2024/12/06/prieres-bannies-dans-lespace-public-cest-trop-facile-dinterdire-reagit-lex-maire-tremblay#:~:text=L'ancien%20maire%20de%20Saguenay,encadrement%20avec%20des%20r%>

[C3%A8gles%20pr%C3%A9cises.&text=%C2%ABSi%20tu%20fais%20une%20pri%C3%A8re,1%C3%A0%2C%20%C3%A7a%20ne%20marche%20pas.](#)

« Québec prêt à soutenir une reconversion de l'église Saint-Jean-Baptiste », *Ici Radio-Canada – Québec*, May 6, 2015, (web), consulted October 26, 2022, <https://Ici.Radio-Canada.ca/nouvelle/719542/eglise-st-jean-baptiste-fermeture-reconversion-patrimoine-religieux>.

« Rencontre avec Jean-Luc Boutin » *L'Express*, 3(50), February 18, 2009, p. 15.

« Rimouski fait une croix sur tout projet public dans la cathédrale », *Ici Radio-Canada – Bas-Saint-Laurent*, July 11, 2017, (web), consulted April 8, 2021, <https://Ici.Radio-Canada.ca/nouvelle/1044662/cathedrale-rimouski-ville-presbytere-fabrique-paradis-bibliotheque#:~:text=La%20Ville%20de%20Rimouski%20%C3%A9carte,la%20restauration%20de%20l'%C3%A9glise>.

« Rimouski: campagne pour sauver les églises », *Ici-Radio-Canada – Est du Québec*, 17 April, 2015, (web) consulted March 16, 2021, <https://Ici.Radio-Canada.ca/nouvelle/716416/capitation-eglises-saint-germain-rimouski-cathedrale-avenir>.

« Trouver une nouvelle vocation pour l'Église Saint-Jean-Baptiste », *Ici Radio-Canada – Québec*, October 1, 2015, (web), consulted October 31, 2022, <https://Ici.Radio-Canada.ca/nouvelle/742051/eglise-saint-jean-baptiste-Québec>.

« Un marguillier de la paroisse Saint-Germain démissionne », *Ici Bas-Saint-Laurent*, April 26, 2018, (web), consulted April 8, 2021, <https://Ici.Radio-Canada.ca/nouvelle/1097610/demission-marguillier-cathedrale-paroisse-saint-germain-monseigneur-denis-grondin>.

« Un projet à l'étude pour sauvegarder la cathédrale de Rimouski », *Ici Radio-Canada – Bas-Saint-Laurent*, October 10, 2017, (web), consulted April 8, 2021, <https://Ici.Radio-Canada.ca/nouvelle/1060619/cathedrale-saint-germain-sauvegarde-patrimoine-rimouski>.

« Un projet de salle multifonctionnelle à l'église Saint-Jean-Baptiste », *Société Radio-Canada*, January 30, 2012, (web), consulted August 14, 2022, <https://Ici.Radio-Canada.ca/nouvelle/548021/eglise-salle-etude>.

« Une assemblée citoyenne pour la cathédrale est organisée », *L'Avantage, Votre journal*, April 18, 2018, (web), consulted April 8, 2021, <https://www.lavantage.qc.ca/article/2018/04/18/une-assemblee-citoyenne-pour-la-cathedrale-est-organi>.

« Une église ferme, mais une autre est sauvée à Rimouski », *Ici Radio-Canada*, November 19, 2015, (web), consulted February 1, 2021, <https://Ici.Radio-Canada.ca/nouvelle/750841/eglises-fermeture-rimouski-culte-catholique#:~:text=La%20d%C3%A9cision%20est%20tomb%C3%A9e%20jeudi,le%20m%C3%Aame%20sort%20est%20sauv%C3%A9e.&text=L'%C3%A9glise%20qui%20est%20%C3%A9pargn%C3%A9e,l'entr%C3%A9e%20ouest%20de%20Rimouski>.

« Victor Lepage souhaite la présence de tous les nouveaux élus », *L'Avantage, Votre journal*, December 11, 2017, (web), consulted April 8, 2021,

<https://www.lavantage.qc.ca/article/2017/12/11/victor-lepage-souhaite-la-presence-de-tous-les-nouveaux-elus>.

Alie-Désilets, Huguette, « Une modeste salle communautaire à l'ombre d'un clocher », *L'Express*, June 6, 2015, p. 4.

Alie-Désilets, Huguette, « Citoyens de Saint-Edmond, réveillez-vous! », *L'Express*, September 7, 2016, (web), consulted January 3, 2024, <https://www.journalexpress.ca/2016/09/07/citoyens-de-saint-edmond-reveillez-vous/>.

Alie-Désilets, Huguette, « Le dossier de l'église de Saint-Edmond : une insulte à la démocratie! », *L'Express*, February 9, 2017, (web), consulted January 4, 2023, <https://www.journalexpress.ca/2017/02/09/le-dossier-de-leglise-de-saint-edmond-une-insulte-a-la-democratie/>.

Alie-Désilets, Huguette, « Que faire de l'église de Saint-Edmond? », *L'Express*, November 16, 2014, (web), consulted January 3, 2024, <https://www.journalexpress.ca/2014/11/14/que-faire-de-leglise-de-saint-edmond..>

Alie-Désilets, Huguette, « Une citoyenne réplique à Josée Marchand », *L'Express*, November 1, 2017, (web), consulted January 5, 2024, <https://www.journalexpress.ca/2017/11/01/citoyenne-replique-a-jo-marchand/>.

April, Josée & Alain Tessier, « Une cathédrale laissée à l'abandon et qui réduit au silence l'un des plus grands orgues du Québec », *L'Avantage, Votre journal*, November 17, 2017, (web), <https://www.lavantage.qc.ca/article/2017/11/17/--une-cathedrale-lais-a-labandon-et-qui-reduit-au-silence-lun>.

April, Serge, *et al.*, « Manifeste pour la sauvegarde des biens culturels », *Le Devoir*, 2 December 1972, p. 5.

Auclair, Ginette, « Avenir incertain pour l'église Saint-Jean-Baptiste », *Le Soleil*, September 27, 2004, p. A18.

Auger, Marie-Andrée, « On va de l'avant à Saint-Edmond », *L'Express*, December 29, 2015, (web), consulted January 3, 2024, <https://www.journalexpress.ca/2015/12/28/on-va-de-lavant-a-saint-edmond/>.

Battis, Todd, "Attendance woes forcing churches to close in Eastern Canada", *CTV News*, May 7, 2017, (web), consulted 13 January 2019, <https://www.ctvnews.ca/canada/attendance-woes-forcing-churches-to-close-in-eastern-canada-1.3402663>.

Bellemare, Monique, « Les églises du Québec : Nicolet », *Patrimoine Québec*, (blog), consulted August 27, 2024, <https://patrimoineduQuébec.com/eglisesduQuébec/nicolet/>.

Benoît, Jacques, 1992 (2 mai), « L'Église est-elle aussi riche qu'on le pense? », *La Presse*, May 2, 1992, p. F-1.

Bherer, Nicole, « Bravo Monseigneur », *L'Avantage, Votre journal*, April 22, 2018, (web), consulted April 8, 2021, <http://www.lavantage.qc.ca/opinion/2018/4/22/bravo-monseigneur.html>.

Boisvert, Jean-Pierre, « 'C'est ridicule au bouté' – le maire Robert Corriveau », *L'Express*, 45(18), October 16, 2016, p. 6.

Boisvert, Jean-Pierre, « De la discorde autour de l'église de Saint-Edmond » *L'Express*, June 4, 2015, (web), consulted September 4, 2025, <https://www.journalexpress.ca/actualite/de-la-discorde-autour-de-leglise-de-saint-edmond/>.

Boisvert, Jean-Pierre, « Des questions sans réponses autour de la démolition de l'église », *L'Express*, 14(34), November 7, 2018, p. 5.

Boisvert, Jean-Pierre, « Église de Saint-Edmond : au diable la consultation publique », *L'Express*, 45(13). September 11, 2016, p. 9.

Boisvert, Jean-Pierre, « Église de Saint-Edmond : consultation publique la semaine prochaine », *L'Express*, October 8, 2015, (web), consulted January 3, 2023, <https://www.journalexpress.ca/2015/10/08/eglise-de-saint-edmond-consultation-publique-la-semaine-prochaine/>.

Boisvert, Jean-Pierre, « Église de Saint-Edmond : l'évêque décidera au début de janvier », *L'Express*, December 22, 2016, (web), consulted January 4, 2024, <https://www.journalexpress.ca/2016/12/22/eglise-de-saint-edmond-leveque-decidera-au-debut-de-janvier/#:~:text=C'est%20au%20d%C3%A9but%20du,-Edmond-de-Grantham>.

Boisvert, Jean-Pierre, « Église de Saint-Edmond : l'offre d'achat à 55 000 \$ est adoptée », *L'Express*, December 20, 2016, (web), consulted January 4, 2024, <https://www.journalexpress.ca/2016/12/20/eglise-de-saint-edmond-loffre-dachat-a-55-000-est-adoptee/>.

Boisvert, Jean-Pierre, « Église de Saint-Edmond : une séance extraordinaire ce mercredi », *L'Express*, 14(25), September 14, 2016, p. 3.

Boisvert, Jean-Pierre, « Élections à Saint-Edmond : victoire de Corriveau et Lafleur », *L'Express*, 14(28), October 5, 2016, p. 5.

Boisvert, Jean-Pierre, « Élections partielles à Saint-Edmond : l'enjeu principal c'est l'église », *L'Extra*, September 27, 2016, (web), consulted January 4, 2023, <https://www.journalexpress.ca/2016/09/27/elections-partielles-a-saint-edmond-lenjeu-principal-cest-leglise/>.

Bonneau, Jean-Claude, « La municipalité de Saint-Edmond-de-Grantham prend la charge des loisirs », *L'Express*, January 10, 2020, (web), consulted January 2, 2024, <https://www.journalexpress.ca/2021/01/10/la-municipalite-de-saint-edmond-prend-la-charge-des-loisirs/>.

Bonneau, Jean-Claude, « Saint-Edmond : un avenir intéressant », *L'Express*, January 4, 2018, (web), available only on Eureka.ca.

Bonnie Allen, “From sacred to secular: Canada set to lose 9,000 churches, warns national heritage group”, *CBC*, March 10, 2019, (web), consulted October 4, 2024, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/losing-churches-canada-1.5046812>.

Bordeleau, Jean-Louis, « Cathédrale de Rimouski : de présumées transactions bancaires irrégulières? », *Ici Radio-Canada – Bas Saint-Laurent*, December 6, 2018, (web), consulted April 8, 2021, <https://Ici.Radio-Canada.ca/nouvelle/1140358/cathedrale-fabrique-saint-germain-transactions-bancaires>.

Bossé, Olivier, « Les libéraux paieraient jusqu’à 40 % », *Le Soleil*, October 19, 2019, p. 4.

Bouchard, Alain, « Guerre de clocher autour du presbytère », *Le Soleil*, March 10, 2000, p. A1.

Bouchard, Alain, « Indulgences pour l’Église », *Le Soleil*, April 8, 1999, p. A1.

Bouchard, Catherine, « La fin d’un ‘monument historique’ », *Le Journal de Québec*, May 25, 2015, p. 7.

Braganza, Chantal, “Why the province’s churches are up for sale”, *TVO*, 8 September 2015 (web), consulted 13 January 2019, <https://www.tvo.org/article/current-affairs/why-the-provinces-churches-are-up-for-sale>.

Brassard, Martin, « Monseigneur Grondin répond aux nombreuses critiques », *Énergie Rimouski*, April 23, 2018, (web), consulted February 11, 2021, <https://www.iheartradio.ca/energie/energie-rimouski/nouvelles/monseigneur-grondin-repond-aux-nombreuses-critiques-1.3771238>.

Brassard, Martin, « Un début de rapprochement entre le Regroupement diocésain et l’Archevêque », *Énergie Rimouski*, June 17, 2019, (web), consulted April 23, 2021, <https://www.iheartradio.ca/rouge-fm/rouge-fm-rimouski/nouvelles/un-debut-de-rapprochement-entre-le-regroupement-diocesain-et-l-archeveque-1.9338013>.

Burns, Robert, “To a Mouse on Turning Her Up in Her Nest with the Plough”, in John Wilson (dir.), *Kilmarnock Edition*, 1786.

Camille B. Vincent, « La Ville refuse de jeter l’éponge », *Le Soleil*, February 21, 2015, p. 12.

Camille Simard, « L’église Saint-Jean-Baptiste pourrait devenir centre de généalogie », *Ici Radio-Canada – Québec*, April 7, 2016, (web), consulted, October 31, 2022, <https://Ici.Radio-Canada.ca/nouvelle/774552/eglise-st-jean-baptiste-convertie-centre-genealogie>.

Camirand, Luc, « Aux citoyens de Saint-Edmond », *L’Express*, November 1, 2017, (web), consulted January 5, 2024, <https://www.journalexpress.ca/2017/11/01/aux-citoyens-de-saint-edmond/>.

Caouette, Marie, « Québec verse 3,5 millions \$ pour les églises patrimoniales », *Le Soleil*, July 6, 2000, p. A5.

Caouette, Marie, « Sts-Martyrs-Canadiens : Fusions imposées des paroisses », *Le Soleil*, October 6, 1999, p. A6.

Carmichael, Simon, « 350,000\$ nécessaires pour rouvrir la cathédrale de Rimouski ‘fermée inutilement’ », *Le Soleil*, August 12, 2020, (web), consulted November 2, 2021, <https://www.lesoleil.com/actualite/en-region/350-000-necessaires-pour-rouvrir-la-cathedrale-de-rimouski-fermee-inutilement-8dd369cb6d5cbd56ca8a7ccc7fc152d9#:~:text=Selon%20le%20rapport%20de%201,2%2C3%20millions%20de%20dollars.&text=Afin%20de%20pouvoir%20rouvrir%20la,de%20350%20000%20%24%20sont%20n%C3%A9cessaires>.

Caron, Jean-François, « L’Église Saint-Jean-Baptiste », *Le Journal de Québec*, May 9, 2021, p. 26.

Cattapan, François, « Fermer l’église Saint-Jean-Baptiste compromettrait sa sauvegarde », *Québec Hebdo*, February 22, 2015, (web), no longer available online, see Eureka.

Cloutier, Elisa, « Plus de 150 jeunes plaident pour sa survie », *Le Journal de Québec*, February 23, 2015, p. 9.

Cloutier, Patricia, « 10 millions \$ pour restaurer l’église Saint-Jean-Baptiste », *Le Soleil*, November 20, 2014, p.17.

Collin, Kathy-Anne, « Église Saint-Jean-Baptiste: optimisme prudent », *L’Exemplaire*, October 25, 2015, (web), consulted October 31, 2022, <https://www.exemplaire.com.ulaval.ca/reportages/eglise-saint-jean-baptiste-optimisme-prudent/>.

Coppen, Luke & Brendan Hodge, “More than 400,000 Catholics left Church in Germany in 2023”, *The Pillar*, June 27, 2024, (web), consulted October 4, 2024, <https://catholiccitizens.org/news/107389/more-than-400000-catholics-left-church-in-germany-in-2023/>.

Cormier, Guy, « Petite méditation sur l’existence canadienne-française », *Cité Libre*, 1(1), 1950, p. 25-36.

Corriveau, Robert, « Commission municipale: 'J'accueille avec soulagement et humilité cette décision' », *L’Express*, November 3, 2017, (web), consulted January 5, 2024, <https://www.journalexpress.ca/2017/11/03/commission-municipale-jaccueille-soulagement-humilite-cette-decision/>.

Côté, Guy L., *Tranquillment, pas vite*, National Film Board of Canada, 1972.

Côté, Michel, « L’église de Saint-Edmond marquera l’histoire : comment? », *L’Express*, 11(26), September 9, 2015, p.6

Côté, Sophie, « L’église Saint-Jean-Baptiste fermera ses portes », *Le Journal de Québec*, February 19, 2015, (web), consulted August 27, 2022, <https://www.journaldeQuébec.com/2015/02/19/leglise-saint-jean-baptiste-fermera-ses-portes>.

Damphouse, Isabelle, « Un rapport sur l’avenir de la cathédrale à la mi-juin », *Ici Bas-Saint-Laurent*, June 3, 2017, (web), consulted April 8, 2021, <https://Ici.Radio-Canada.ca/nouvelle/1037686/avenir-cathedrale-rimouski-consultation-publique>.

Demers, Marilyne, « L'église de Saint-Edmond-de-Grantham sera démolie en février », *L'Express*, January 29, 2019, (web), consulted September 1, 2025, <https://www.journalexpress.ca/2019/01/29/leglise-de-saint-edmond-de-grantham-sera-demolie-en-fevrier/>.

Demers-Lemay, Miriane, « Cathédrale de Rimouski : une accalmie se dessine », *Ici Bas-Saint-Laurent*, June 18, 2019, consulted April 23, 2021, <https://Ici.Radio-Canada.ca/nouvelle/1187259/cathedrale-rimouski-manifestation-sauvegarde-eglise-avenir>.

Desbiens, Vincent, « Rachetée pour 1\$: l'église patrimoniale Saint-Jean-Baptiste 'restera une église' », *Le Journal de Québec*, January 21, 2022, (web), consulted December 4, 2024, <https://www.journaldeQuebec.com/2024/01/21/rachetee-pour-1-leglise-patrimoniale-saint-jean-baptiste--restera-une-eglise>.

Dickinson, Greg M. & W. Rod Dolmage, "Education, religion, and the courts in Ontario", *Canadian Journal of Education/Revue canadienne de l'éducation*, 21(4), 1996, p. 363-383.

Drouin, Edith, « Cathédrale de Rimouski: le projet de lieu de culte à nouveau présenté », *Ici Radio-Canada – Bas-Saint-Laurent*, February 22, 2018, (web), consulted April 8, 2021, <https://Ici.Radio-Canada.ca/nouvelle/1085198/cathedrale-rimouski-projet-lieu-culte-regroupement-diocesain>.

Drouin, Edith, « La Cathédrale de Rimouski : des citoyens demandent à la Ville d'intervenir », *Ici Radio-Canada*, March 21, 2017, (web), consulted April 8, 2021, <https://Ici.Radio-Canada.ca/nouvelle/1023436/citoyens-intervention-ville-rimouski-cathedrale-saint-germain-conseil-municipal>.

Ducas, Isabelle, « Des laitues pour sauver une église », *La Presse*, April 1, 2018, (web), consulted January 6, 2025, <https://www.lapresse.ca/actualites/201803/31/01-5159413-des-laitues-pour-sauver-une-eglise.php>.

Ébacher, Jessica, « Saint-Edmond : deux femmes, deux visions », *L'Express*, 42(14), October 20, 2013, p. 8-9.

« Enquête de la Commission municipale du Québec : le maire sortant Robert Corriveau blanchi », *L'Express*, November 3, 2017, (web), consulted January 5, 2024, <https://www.journalexpress.ca/2017/11/03/enquete-de-commission-municipale-Québec-maire-sortant-robert-corriveau-blanchi/>.

Folkin, Tali, "Gone by 2040? : Statistics report a 'wake-up call' to church, says primate", *Anglican Journal of Canada*, 146(1), 2020, p. 6-8.

Fontaine, Paul, « La cathédrale de Rimouski en voie de réouverture pour de bon », *Ici Bas-Saint-Laurent*, December 24, 2023, (web), consulted November 14, 2024, <https://Ici.Radio-Canada.ca/nouvelle/2037334/fabrique-saint-germain-toiture-eglise-patrimoine-noel>.

Fournier, Johanne, « Cathédrale de Rimouski : Harold LeBel en appelle au consensus », *Le Soleil*, August 27, 2021, (web), consulted February 1, 2021, <https://www.lesoleil.com/actualite/en-region/cathedrale-de-rimouski-harold-lebel-en-appelle-au-consensus-18d2b99b78f9ad7702f24ef961aab095>.

Fournier, Johanne, « Cathédrale de Rimouski : la fin d'une longue saga », *Le Soleil*, February 6, 2019, p. HE.

Fournier, Johanne, « Cathédrale de Rimouski : un changement de vocation pour échapper à la démolition », *Le Soleil*, April 28, 2015, (web), consulted February 2, 2021, <https://www.lesoleil.com/actualite/cathedrale-de-rimouski-un-changement-de-vocation-pour-echapper-a-la-demolition-12ebc938d0536f0fcf73d9eb408fafbe>.

Fournier, Johanne, « La cathédrale de Rimouski ne sera plus un lieu de culte », *Le Soleil*, June 29, 2017, (web), consulted April 8, 2017, <https://www.lesoleil.com/actualite/en-region/la-cathedrale-de-rimouski-ne-sera-plus-un-lieu-de-culte-d028e460e6451143a6b236b5eac1f49c>.

Fournier, Johanne, « Nouvelle tuile pour la cathédrale de Rimouski », *Le Soleil*, March 21, 2017, (web), consulted April 8, 2021, <https://www.lesoleil.com/actualite/en-region/nouvelle-tuile-pour-lacathedrale-de-rimouski-29b88fbc44770e018f5ce8d4897ebc3e>.

Fournier, Johanne, « Première Messe de Minuit en six ans dans la cathédrale de Rimouski », *Le Soleil*, December 21, 2020, (web), consulted November 2, 2021, <https://www.lesoleil.com/actualite/en-region/premiere-messe-de-noel-en-six-ans-dans-la-cathedrale-de-rimouski-69acb3019a42841fdf01b2a4e802f2a9>.

Fournier, Johanne, « Rebondissement dans le dossier de la cathédrale de Rimouski », *Le Soleil*, April 23, 2018, (web), consulted April 8, 2021, <https://www.lesoleil.com/actualite/en-region/rebondissement-dans-le-dossier-de-la-cathedrale-de-rimouski-74ccd8d2ea90e3ffe330d5e786e7f437>.

Fournier, Johanne, « Rimouski, une paroisse sens dessus dessous », *Le Soleil*, July 18, 2018, p. HE.

Fournier, Johanne, « Une réunion de paroisse qui tourne mal à Rimouski », *Le Soleil*, October 1, 2017, (web), consulted April 8, 2021, <https://www.lesoleil.com/actualite/en-region/une-reunion-de-paroisse-qui-tourne-mal-a-rimouski-69523e0309149db2a412c3e0f0a527b0>.

Gagné, Marcel, « Pour une restauration de la cathédrale dans les plus brefs délais », *L'Avantage, Votre journal*, June 18, 2018, (web), consulted April 8, 2021, <https://www.lavantage.qc.ca/article/2018/06/18/pour-une-restauration-de-la-cathedrale>.

Gagnon, Damien, « Statut de monument à 16 églises de Québec », *Le Soleil*, December 8, 1994, p. B1.

Gallant, Laurence, « Exclusion de deux marguilliers : un abbé de Québec croit les arguments de l'archevêché injustifiés », *Ici Radio-Canada*, February 3, 2017, (web), consulted April 8, 2021, <https://Ici.Radio-Canada.ca/nouvelle/1014714/marguilliers-exclus-fabrique-st-germain-Québec>.

[cathedrale#:~:text=L'abb%C3%A9%20Pierre%20Gingras%2C%20cur%C3%A9,chancelier%20du%20dioc%C3%A8se%20de%20Rimouski.&text=Peu%20importe%20qui%20est%20en,sont%20les%20paroissiens%20qui%20d%C3%A9cident.](#)

Garant, Élisabeth, « L'école face au défi de la laïcité », *Relations*, March 2003, (web), consulted January 10, 2025, <https://cjf.qc.ca/revue-relations/publication/article/lecole-face-au-defi-de-la-lacite/?srsltid=AfmBOopOFZpzqVZkgAgOMs8VAY6Js097whG8q0eJz9MTLsbG4EQ9wj2h>.

Gaudreau, Valérie, « Du centre de jour à la zoothérapie », *Le Soleil*, November 8, 2015, p. 6.

Gaudreau, Valérie, « La Ville alloue 15 M\$ pour restaurer sept églises », *Le Soleil*, September 20, 2016, (web), consulted November 1, 2022, <https://www.lesoleil.com/2016/09/20/la-ville-alloue-15-m-pour-restaurer-sept-eglises-45bb991f1ff0a380720d154412901d08>.

Gaudreau, Valérie, « Le tourisme religieux en hausse de 35 % à Québec », *Le Soleil*, 23 July 2014, (web), consulted 13 January 2019, <https://www.lapresse.ca/le-soleil/actualites/societe/201407/23/01-4786142-le-tourisme-religieux-en-hausse-de-35-a-Québec.php>.

Gaudreau, Valérie, « Sauvegarde du patrimoine : les maires appelés à l'aide », *Le Soleil*, November 21, 2016, (web), consulted November 1, 2022, <https://www.lesoleil.com/2016/11/22/sauvegarde-du-patrimoine-les-maires-appelles-a-laide-11ebb8f9197e0fc709bad640adfe0c5d>.

Genest, Catherine, « Le catastrophe patrimoniale dont tout le monde se fout », *Voir*, May 14, 2015, (web) consulted October 19, 2020, <https://voir.ca/chroniques/satellite-418/2015/05/14/la-catastrophe-patrimoniale-dont-tout-le-monde-se-fout/>.

Giguère-Martel, Cynthia, « Église de Saint-Edmond : la consultation publique repoussée en octobre », *L'Express*, 11(23), August 19, 2015, p.6.

Gloutenay, François, « 800 lieux de cultes 'en mutation' », *Présence : Information religieuse*, February 27, 2024 (web), consulted October 3, 2024, <https://presence-info.ca/article/actualite/patrimoine/800-lieux-de-culte-dits-en-mutation/>.

Gloutnay, François, « Le CAQ consacrait 25 millions \$ au patrimoine religieux », *Présence, information religieuse*, 17 September 2018, (web), consulted 13 January 2019, <http://presence-info.ca/article/politique/la-caq-consacrerait-25-m-au-patrimoine-religieux>.

Gloutnay, François, « Patrimoine religieux: 30% de moins cette année », *Présence, information religieuse*, August 27, 2024, (web), consulted February 28, 2025. <https://presence-info.ca/article/actualite/patrimoine/patrimoine-religieux-30-de-moins-cette-annee/>.

Habashi, Jonathan, « Saint-Edmond opte pour la continuité », *L'Express*, 8(33), November 6, 2013, p. 36.

Hertzler-McCain, Aleja, “Catholic parishes disproportionately closed in poor, Black and Latino neighborhoods”, *Religion News*, April 5, 2024, (web), consulted, October 25, 2024,

<https://religionnews.com/2024/04/05/catholic-parishes-disproportionately-closed-in-poor-black-and-latino-neighborhoods/>.

Huot, Paul, « Exclut de l'assemblée de fabrique à cause de leur position sur la cathédrale de Rimouski? », *Ici Radio-Canada*, January 31, 2017, (web), consulted April 8, 2021, <https://Ici.Radio-Canada.ca/nouvelle/1014156/marguilliers-fabrique-st-germain-rimouski-cathedrale-eveque#:~:text=Deux%20des%20trois%20marguilliers%20qui,v%C3%A9ritable%20motif%20de%20leur%20exclusion>.

Huot, Paul, « L'élection de deux nouveaux marguilliers changera-t-elle l'avenir de la cathédrale », *Ici Bas-Saint-Laurent*, November 28, 2016, (web), consulted April 8, 2021, <https://Ici.Radio-Canada.ca/nouvelle/1002570/cathedrale-rimouski-fabrique-saint-germain-avenir>.

Huot, Paul, « La cathédrale de Rimouski ne sera pas transformé en complexe culturel », *Radio-Canada*, June 16, 2016, (web) consulted January 2, 2021, <https://Ici.Radio-Canada.ca/nouvelle/787858/cathedrale-rimouski-coop-paradis-culturel-culte-comite-1862-2016>.

Huot, Paul, « La cathédrale Saint-Germain n'est plus assurée contre les sinistres », *Ici Bas-Saint-Laurent*, March 31, 2017, (web), consulted September 1, 2025, <https://ici.radio-canada.ca/nouvelle/1025575/cathedrale-saint-germain-rimouski-sinistre-assurance>.

Jenkins, Simon, "England's churches can survive – but the religion will have to go", *The Guardian*, October 22, 2015, (web), consulted 13 January 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/oct/22/churches-survive-church-of-england-religion-buildings>.

Koussens, David & Catherine Foisy (dirs.), *Les catholiques québécois et la laïcité*, Montreal, Presses de l'Université de Montréal, 2018.

Lacouline, Pierre, « L'avenir de ma paroisse », *Le Soleil*, May 14, 1999, p. B6.

Lacouline, Pierre, « L'avenir de la paroisse des Saints-Martyrs Canadiens de Québec », *Le Soleil*, February 22, 1999, p. B8.

Lacroix, Xavier, « Relance des discussions pour l'avenir de la cathédrale », *Ici Radio-Canada – Bas-Saint-Laurent*, November 27, 2017, (web), consulted April 8, 2021, <https://Ici.Radio-Canada.ca/nouvelle/1069767/relance-discussions-avenir-cathedrale-rimouski>.

Lajoie, Aliette, « Mes collègues du conseil ont été tenaces », *L'Express*, February 7, 2017, (web), consulted January 5, 2024, <https://www.journalexpress.ca/2017/02/21/mes-collegues-du-conseil-ont-ete-tenaces/>.

Langlois, Jean-Phillipe, « Jacques Landry critique vivement la position de Mgr. Grondin », *L'Avantage, Votre journal*, 22(05), July 5, 2017, p. 4.

Langlois, Jean-Phillipe, « Les visions de l'Archevêché et de la Ville s'opposent », *L'Avantage, Votre journal*, 22(5), p. 4.

Langlois, Simon, « Fermeture de l'église Saint-Jean-Baptiste et fin des paroisses », *Regards sur la société*, les blogues de contact de l'Université Laval, May 6, 2015, (web), consulted August 8, 2022, http://www.contact.ulaval.ca/article_blogue/fermeture-de-leglise-saint-jean-baptiste-et-fin-des-paroisses/.

Lavallée, Jean-Luc, « John Porter en renfort », *Le Journal de Québec*, October 21, 2017, p. 20.

Lavoie, Jean-Marc, « La démocratie de l'évêque », *L'Avantage, Votre journal*, January 23, 2018, (web), consulted April 8, 2021, [lavantage.qc.ca/article/2018/01/23/la-democratie-de-leveque](http://www.lavantage.qc.ca/article/2018/01/23/la-democratie-de-leveque).

Lavoie, Jean-Marc, « Préserver la vocation première de la Cathédrale », *L'Avantage, Votre journal*, July 8, 2016, (web), consulted September 18, 2017, <https://www.lavantage.qc.ca/article/2016/7/8/preserver-la-vocation-premiere-de-la-cat-4581988>.

Le Chasseur, Gilles, « À qui appartient la cathédrale de Rimouski? », *Le Soleil*, December 12, 2017, (web), consulted April 8, 2021, <https://www.lesoleil.com/opinions/a-qui-appartient-la-cathedrale-de-rimouski-c9ee8eab390664c40cc8661be503ce25>,

Le Chasseur, Gilles, « Cathédrale de Rimouski, retour à la case de départ », *L'Avantage, Votre journal*, February 11, 2019, (web), consulted April 8, 2021, <https://www.lavantage.qc.ca/article/2019/02/11/cathedrale-de-rimouski-retour-a-la-case-depart>.

Le Chasseur, Gilles, « Encore et toujours la... », *L'Avantage, Votre journal*, April 26, 2018, (web), consulted April 8, 2021, <http://lavantage.qc.ca/opinion/tribune-libre/2018/4/26/encore-et-toujours-la-cathedrale.html>.

Le Chasseur, Gilles, « Jésus a chassé les vendeurs du Temple, Mgr. Grondin veut chasser Dieu de la Cathédrale! », *L'Avantage Votre journal*, December 13, 2017, (web), consulted April 8, 2021, <https://www.lavantage.qc.ca/article/2017/12/13/jesus-a-chasse-les-vendeurs-du-temple--mgr-grondin-veut-chasser->.

Le Chasseur, Gilles, « La Cathédrale, de la joie à l'inquiétude », *L'Avantage, Votre journal*, August 8, 2016.

Le Chasseur, Gilles, « La réalité de 2016 commande aux paroissiens de revenir à la cathédrale », *L'Avantage, Votre journal*, September 23, 2016, (web), consulted September 18, 2017, <http://www.lavantage.qc.ca/opinion/2016/9/23/la-realite-de-2016-commande-aux-paroissiens-de-revenir-a-la-cathedrale.html>.

Lechaussée, Catherine, « Démolitions d'églises controversée à Québec : à quand remonte le phénomène », *Ici Radio-Canada*, October 4, 2020, (web), consulted March 23, 2023, <https://Ici.Radio-Canada.ca/sujet/ca-date-pas-dhier/actualite/document/nouvelles/article/1738366/demolitions-eglises-patrimoine-promoteurs-Québec-histoire>.

Leclerc, Jean-Claude, « 100% sûr d'échouer, si l'on ne fait rien! », *L'Avantage, Votre journal*, 19(48), May 6, 2015, p. 10.

Leclerc, Jean-Claude, « Un ‘plaster’ sur le bobo », *L’Avantage, Votre journal*, 20(25), November 25, 2015, p. 10.

Leduc, Daniel, « Restauration de la cathédrale de Rimouski : deux démissionnaires dénoncent sa ‘non viabilité’ », *Ici Radio-Canada – Est du Québec*, September 9, 2016, (web), consulted March 16, 2021, <https://Ici.Radio-Canada.ca/nouvelle/802209/restauration-cathedrale-rimouski-projet-fosse-creuse>.

Leduc, Gilbert, « Québec a déniché un ‘p’tit’ trois millions pour les églises de Québec », *Le Soleil*, August 3, 1994, p. A3.

Leduc, Gilbert, « Réfections des églises de la région de Québec », *Le Soleil*, August 2, 1994, p. A1.

Le Chasseur, Gilles, « Le scandale et la honte ont une cathédrale », *L’Avantage, Votre journal*, November 11, 2019, (web), consulted April 8, 2020, <https://www.lavantage.qc.ca/article/2019/11/11/le-scandale-et-la-honte-ont-une-cathedrale>

Le Chasseur, Gilles, « Le scandale et la honte ont une cathédrale », *Le Mouton noir*, January 26, 2020, p. 1,3.

Le Chasseur, Gilles, « Rimouski : désacralisée ou la cerise sur le gâteau », *Le Soleil*, July 5, 2017, (web), consulted April 8, 2020, <https://www.lesoleil.com/opinions/point-de-vue/rimouski-desacrali-ou-la-cerise-sur-le-gateau-c9e85d8ac60f16e07286ed1485f9e245>.

Le Chasseur, Gilles, « Vox populi vox dei », *Le Soleil*, February 27, 2017, (web), consulted May 21, 2021, <https://www.lesoleil.com/opinions/point-de-vue/cathedrale-de-rimouski-vox-populi-vox-dei-6a7d9c594c4ce7ebb672fd92e280340a>.

Légaré, Agathe, « Un projet pour sauver l’église Saint-Jean-Baptiste », *L’infobourg*, 24(2), Printemps 2012, p. 1-2.

Lê-Huu, Véronica, « Une fiducie pour préserver le patrimoine religieux de Québec », *Ici Radio-Canada – Québec*, June 13, 2018, (web), consulted November 2, 2018, <https://Ici.Radio-Canada.ca/nouvelle/1106794/fiducie-patrimoine-religieux-sauvegarde-eglises-Québec>.

Lemieux, Louis-Guy, « Les églises de Québec », *Le Soleil*, March 11, 2002, p. A9.

Lemieux, Louis-Guy, « Patrimoine religieux bâti : Église et Villes s’affrontent », *Le Soleil*, November 3, 2005, p. A7.

Lemieux, Louis-Guy, « Une église exemplaire », *Le Soleil*, January 18, 1995, p. B2.

Lepage, Charles, « Archevêché de Rimouski : la possible vente ne fait pas l’unanimité », *L’Avantage, Votre journal*, April 14, 2021, (web), consulted October 7, 2021, <https://www.lavantage.qc.ca/article/2021/04/14/archeveche-de-rimouski-la-possible-vente-ne-fait-pas-l-unanimite>.

Lepage, Charles, « Le non-respect d’un décret mène la vie dure aux marguilliers de la paroisse Saint-Germain », *L’Avantage, Votre journal*, July 18, 2018. (web), consulted April 8, 2021,

<https://www.lavantage.qc.ca/article/2018/07/18/le-non-respect-dun-decret-mene-la-vie-dure-aux-marguilliers-de-l>.

Luxmoore, Jonathan “Europe’s church creatively re-thinks as numbers plummet”, *National Catholic Reporter*, 15 November 2017, (web) consulted 13 January 2019, <https://www.ncronline.org/news/world/europes-church-creatively-rethinks-numbers-plummet>.

Luxmoore, Jonathan, “With decline in participation, Brussels archdiocese to close churches”, *National Catholic Reporter*, February 8, 2013, (web), consulted 13 January 2019, <https://www.ncronline.org/news/world/decline-participation-brussels-archdiocese-close-churches>.

Lux, Ryan “A Cathedral Too Far: Testing the limits of Catholic church closure in Québec”, *Studies in Religion/Sciences Religieuses*, Spring 2025, <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/00084298251314745>.

Mantyk, Adeline, « Assemblée pour l’avenir de la cathédrale », *L’Avantage, Votre journal*, 22(4), November 15, 2017, p. 20.

Mantyk, Adeline, « La Ville demande une évaluation de la structure », *L’Avantage, Votre journal*, 21(47), p. 11.

Mantyk, Adeline, « Le Comité cathédrale 2016 s’élargit au diocèse », *L’Avantage, Votre journal*, 21(47), April 26, 2017, p. 11.

Mantyk, Adeline, « Le maire de Rimouski souhaite une consultation publique élargie », *L’Avantage, Votre journal*, 21(41), March 15, 2017, p. 8.

Mantyk, Adeline, « Le projet de transformation déçoit », *L’Avantage, Votre journal*, February 13, 2019, p. 3.

Mantyk, Adeline, « Le Regroupement diocésain dénonce une tentative d’influence », *L’Avantage, Votre journal*, 21(52), p. 5.

Mantyk, Adeline, « Le représentant du pape au Canada se rend à Rimouski », *L’Avantage, Votre journal*, 22(11), August 16, 2017, p. 5.

Mantyk, Adeline, « Les cinq candidats à la maire se prononcent sur la cathédrale de Rimouski », *L’Avantage, Votre journal*, 22(20), October 16, 2017, p. 8.

Mantyk, Adeline, « Les marguilliers transfèrent la responsabilité de la paroisse », *L’Avantage, Votre journal*, 23(4), June 27, 2018, p. 3.

Mantyk, Adeline, « Les Rimouskois souhaitent le maintien du culte dans la cathédrale », *L’Avantage, Votre journal*, 22(11), August 16, 2017, p. 3.

Mantyk, Adeline, « Lettre de Mgr. Grondin sur la cathédrale Saint-Germain de Rimouski », *L’Avantage, Votre journal*, October 25, 2018, (web), consulted April 8, 2021, <https://www.lavantage.qc.ca/article/2018/10/25/cathedrale-saint-germain-de-rimouski#:~:text=Lettre%20de%20Mgr%20Grondin%20sur%20la%20cath%C3%A9drale%20S>

[aint-Germain%20de%20Rimouski,-%C2%A9Archives&text=Cath%C3%A9drale%20Saint-Germain%20de%20Rimouski%20est%20ferm%C3%A9%20au,depuis%20pr%C3%A8s%20de%204%20ans.&text=Nous%20sommes%20appel%C3%A9s%20%C3%A0%20voir,la%20communauté%20catholique%20de%20Rimouski.](#)

Mantyk, Adeline, « Marc Parent élu : Priorité à la cathédrale », *L'Avantage, Votre journal*, 22(23), November 8, 2017, p. 1&3.

Mantyk, Adeline, « Mises en demeure et plaintes dans le diocèse de Rimouski », *L'Avantage, Votre journal*, 21(38), p. 8.

Mantyk, Adeline, « Cinq scénarios possibles pour l'utilisation de la cathédrale », *L'Avantage, Votre journal*, 21(48), p. 5.

Mantyk, Adeline, « Développement dans le dossier de la cathédrale », *L'Avantage, Votre journal*, 24(6), July 17, 2019, p. 6.

Mantyk, Adeline, « L'Archevêché reprend la barre », *L'Avantage, Votre journal*, 22(47), April 25, 2018, p. 1,8.

Mantyk, Adeline, « L'archevêque souhaite un ralliement autour de la Cathédrale », *L'Avantage, Votre journal*, 21(39), March 1, 2017, p. 7.

Mantyk, Adeline, « L'économe fait une mise au point », *L'Avantage, Votre journal*, 21(52), May 31, 2017, p. 5.

Mantyk, Adeline, « La balle est dans le camp du Diocèse et de la Fabrique », *L'Avantage, Votre journal*, 21(15), p.15.

Mantyk, Adeline, « Les marguilliers organisent un mini concert d'orgue dans la cathédrale de Rimouski », *L'Avantage, Votre journal*, July 5, 2018, (web), consulted April 8, 2021, <https://www.lavantage.qc.ca/article/2018/07/05/les-marguilliers-organisent-un-mini-concert-dorgue-dans-la-cathed>.

Mantyk, Adeline, « Victor Lepage est marguillier, selon un avis juridique », *L'Avantage, Votre journal*, 21(46), April 19, 2017, p. 4.

Marchand, Josée, « À St-Edmond-de-G ... Gaules : une 'Idéfix', celle de la joie de vivre », *L'Express*, October 31, 2017, (web), consulted January 5, 2024, <https://www.journalexpress.ca/2017/10/31/a-st-edmond-de-ggaules-idefix-celle-de-joie-de-vivre/>.

Martin Gérard, « La municipalité de Saint-Edmond devient locataire de l'église », *L'Express*, 41(40), April 23, 2013, p. 19.

Martin, Gérard, « À Saint-Edmond, le temps est aux décisions concernant l'église », *L'Express*, 40(10), September 9, 2012, p. 32.

Martin, Gérard, « Pourquoi pas une ballade à Saint-Edmond pour un dimanche tout en musique », *L'Express*, 3(19), July 16, 2008.

Martin, Stéphanie, « Patrimoine à Québec : Jean Rousseau accuse Marie-Josée Savard de s'être traîné les pieds », *Le Journal de Québec*, October 15, 2021, (web), consulted November 8, 2022, <https://www.journaldeQuebec.com/2021/10/15/patrimoine-a-Quebec-jean-rousseau-accuse-marie-jo-savard-de-setre-traine-les-pieds>.

Martin, Stéphanie, « Patrimoine et Vieux Québec : Marchand ne veut pas un 'Walt Disney en carton' », *Le Journal de Québec*, October 21, 2021, (web), consulted November 8, 2022, <https://www.qub.ca/article/marchand-ne-veut-pas-dun-walt-disney-en-carton-1058967514>.

Martin, Stéphanie, « Tourisme religieux : un bon défi pour le Québec », *Le Soleil*, May 8, 2013, (web) consulted July 19, 2023, <https://www.lesoleil.com/2013/05/08/tourisme-religieux-un-bon-defi-pour-Quebec-007c5b7a5bcf3b8a1612e85dd47b81b0/>.

Martin, Stéphanie, « Un comité 'costaud' pour réfléchir à l'avenir des églises de Québec », *Le Journal de Québec*, December 7, 2017, (web), consulted November 2, 2022, <https://www.journaldeQuebec.com/2017/12/07/un-comite-costaud-pour-reflechir-a-lavenir-des-eglises>.

Martin, Thérèse, « Le plan de sauvetage sera dévoilé en avril », *L'Avantage, Votre journal*, 20(40), March 9, 2016, p. 9.

Martin, Thérèse, « Conférence sur la Cathédrale Saint-Germain », *L'Avantage, Votre journal*, 19(51), May 27, 2015, p. 43.

Martin, Thérèse, « Des participants inquiets mais solidaires », *L'Avantage, Votre journal*, 19(48), May 6, 2015, p. 4.

Martin, Thérèse, « Fermetures d'églises à Rimouski : des décisions difficiles mais nécessaires », *L'Avantage, Votre journal*, March 18, 2015, (web) consulted September 18, 2017, <https://www.lavantage.qc.ca/actualites/2015/3/18/fermeture-d-eglises-a-rimouski-des-deci-4081750.html>.

Martin, Thérèse, « Harold Lebel et la Cathédrale », *L'Avantage, Votre journal*, 19(48), May 6, 2015, p. 9.

Martin, Thérèse, « La cathédrale, l'une des vedettes de l'ACFAS », *L'Avantage, Votre journal*, 19(49), May 13, 2015, p. 6.

Martin, Thérèse, « La Coop Paradis peut être logée dans la Cathédrale », *L'Avantage, Votre journal*, 20(12), August 26, 2015, p. 4.

Martin, Thérèse, « La survie de la Cathédrale est un défi collectif », *L'Avantage, Votre journal*, 18(41), March 18, 2015, p. 5.

Martin, Thérèse, « La valeur de la Cathédrale est incontestable », *L'Avantage, Votre journal*, 20(01), June 10, 2015, p. 6.

Martin, Thérèse, « Le Québec a les yeux tournés vers la Cathédrale de Rimouski », *L'Avantage, Votre journal*, 19(48), p.4.

- Martin, Thérèse, « Les fidèles ‘déportés’ à Saint-Pie-X », *L’Avantage*, December 3, 2014, p. 5.
- Martin, Thérèse, « Les paroissiens de Sainte-Agnès/Saint-Yves sont convoqués », *L’Avantage, Votre journal*, 20(43), March 30, 2016, p. 4.
- Martin, Thérèse, « Mgr. Grondin fait confiance au comité Cathédrale 1862 », *L’Avantage, Votre journal*, 20(14), September 9, 2015, p. 8.
- Martin, Thérèse, « Plus un fleuron patrimonial qu’un lieu de culte », *L’Avantage, Votre journal*, 19(34), January 28, 2015, p. 5.
- Martin, Thérèse, « Rimouski accueille son nouvel archevêque », *L’Avantage, votre journal*, 20(02), June 17, 2015, p. 12.
- Martin, Thérèse, « Rimouski soutient la Coop Paradis » *L’Avantage, Votre journal*, 20(24), November 18, 2015, p. 18.
- Martin, Thérèse, « Un héritage de bonté et de générosité », *L’Avantage, Votre journal*, 19(32), January 14, 2015, p. 4.
- Martin, Thérèse, « Un joyau pour l’ensemble du Québec », *L’Avantage, Votre journal*, 20(27), December 9, 2015, p. 18.
- Martin, Thérèse, « Le diocèse de Rimouski pleure son pasteur », *L’Avantage, Votre journal*, 19(32), January 14, 2015, p. 5.
- Mathieur, Annie, « Une possible seconde vie pour l’église Saint-Dominique », *Le Soleil*, January 16, 2013, (web), consulted December 5, 2024, <https://www.lesoleil.com/2013/01/16/une-possible-seconde-vie-pour-leglise-saint-dominique-7b1a4571afb14d93a41fe6b6d652bffd>.
- Melnyk, Adeline, « La Fabrique et la ville accueillent favorablement la consultation publique », *L’Avantage, Votre journal*, 21(48), May 3, 2017, p. 5.
- Michaud, Pierre, « 3 400 trous dans la cathédrale ... pour rien! », *Journal le soir*, August 12, 2020, (web), consulted November 2, 2021, <https://journallesoir.ca/2020/08/12/3-400-trous-dans-la-cathedrale-pour-rien/>.
- Michaud, Pierre, « Fini les querelles pour l’église Nazareth », *Progrès-Echo-Le Rimouskois*, April 13, 2009, (web) consulted May 6, 2020, <http://www.dioceserimouski.com/egl/egl/nazareth.pdf>.
- Michaud, Pierre, « Front commun contre les administrateurs de la Fabrique », *L’Avantage, Votre journal*, 21(20), October 19, 2016, p. 6.
- Michaud, Pierre, « Jacques Landry demande la prise en charge immédiate de la cathédrale », *L’Avantage, Votre journal*, 21(21), October 26, 2016, p. 7.
- Michaud, Pierre, « L’avocate de la Fabrique Saint-Germain interpelle la Ville de Rimouski », *Journal de soir*, March 29, 2021, (web), consulted April 27, 2021,

<https://journallesoir.ca/2021/03/29/lavocate-de-la-fabrique-saint-germain-interpelle-la-ville-de-rimouski/>.

Michaud, Pierre, « La Fabrique doit créer un registre parallèle », *L'Avantage, Votre journal*, August 30, 2018, (web), consulted April 8, 2021, <https://www.lavantage.qc.ca/article/2018/08/30/la-fabrique-doit-creer-un-registre-parallele>.

Michaud, Pierre, « Le consensus sur la cathédrale s'annonce difficile », *Journal le soir*, October 28, 2020, (web) consulted January 31, 2021, <https://journallesoir.ca/2020/08/28/le-consensus-sur-la-cathedrale-sannonce-difficile/#:~:text=Les%20r%C3%A9actions%20sont%20mitig%C3%A9es%20%C3%A0,de%20la%20cath%C3%A9drale%20de%20Rimouski>.

Michaud, Pierre, « Le greffier Doucet a refusé l'offre de Mgr. Grondin », *L'Avantage, Votre journal*, 21(21), October 2016, p. 3.

Michaud, Pierre, « Le nouveau comité pour la cathédrale se dévoile », *L'Avantage, Votre journal*, 20(46), April 20, 2016, p. 3.

Michaud, Pierre, « Mgr. Grondin a la ferme intention de sauver la cathédrale », *L'Avantage, Votre journal*, 21(22), November 2, 2016, p. 8.

Michaud, Pierre, « Monseigneur Grondin préparait son départ », *Journal le soir*, July 8, 2020, (web), consulted November 2, 2021, <https://journallesoir.ca/2020/07/08/monseigneur-grondin-preparerait-son-depart/>.

Michaud, Pierre, « Pascal Gagnon est loin d'être découragé », *Journal le soir*, April 27, 2020, (web), consulted February 11, 2021, <https://journallesoir.ca/2020/04/27/pascal-gagnon-est-loin-detre-decourage/>.

Michaud, Pierre, « Rimouski pourrait revenir dans le dossier », *L'Avantage, Votre journal*, 23(13), September 5, 2018, p. 3.

Michaud, Pierre, « Trois marguilliers rejoignent la Fabrique », *L'Avantage, Votre journal*, 22(27), December 6, 2017, p. 5.

Michaud, Pierre, « À l'archevêché pour s'enregistrer », *L'Avantage, Votre journal*, August 29, 2018, (web), consulted April 8, <https://www.lavantage.qc.ca/article/2018/08/29/a-l-archeveche-pour-s-enregistrer>.

Michaud, Pierre, « Abandonner les autres églises au profit de la cathédrale », *L'Avantage, Votre journal*, 21(17), September 28, 2016, p. 4.

Michaud, Pierre, « Archevêché de Rimouski : Mgr. Grondin réagit à la rumeur », *L'Avantage, Votre journal*, March 11, 2015, (web), consulted October 17, 2021, <https://www.lavantage.qc.ca/Actualites/Societe/2015-03-11/article-4073652/Archeveche-de-Rimouski%3A-Mgr-Grondin-reagit-a-la-rumeur/1>.

Michaud, Pierre, « Cathédrale 2016 tend la main à la Fabrique », *L'Avantage, Votre journal*, 21(18), October 5, 2016, p. 6.

Michaud, Pierre, « Changement de garde à l'Archevêché », *Journal le soir*, June 22, 2020, (web), consulted January 2, 2021, <https://journallesoir.ca/2020/06/22/changement-de-garde-a-larcheveche/>.

Miller, Vikki, & Jonathon Wynne-Jones, "Church of England Church closures accelerate", *The Telegraph*, July 26, 2008, (web), consulted 13 January 2019, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/religion/2461839/Church-of-England-church-closures-accelerate.html>.

Moalla, Taïeb, « Église Saint-Jean-Baptiste : le maire affirme qu'elle sera sauvée », *Le Journal de Québec*, October 2, 2015, (web), consulted October 2, 2015, <https://www.journaldeQuebec.com/2015/10/02/eglise-saint-jean-baptiste-le-maire-affirme-quelle-sera-sauvee>.

Moalla, Taïeb, « Élections municipales: Équipe Savard promet d'acheter l'église Saint-Jean-Baptiste », *Le Journal de Québec*, October 1, 2021, p. 18.

Moalla, Taïeb, « La Ville de Québec veut aider à sauver l'église Saint-Jean-Baptiste », *Le Journal de Québec*, February 21, 2015, p. 22, original : « La Ville ne s'occupe pas des églises ».

Moalla, Taïeb, « La Ville ne paiera pas pour le chauffage, dit le maire Labeaume », *Le Journal de Québec*, February 8, 2018, p. 32.

Morin, Annie, « De l'argent pour 'sauver' des bijoux religieux de Québec », *Le Soleil*, August 8, 2017, (web), consulted November 1, 2022, <https://www.lesoleil.com/2017/08/08/de-largent-pour-sauver-des-joyaux-religieux-de-Quebec-22d709a9abda1524c86d2b12ef253592>.

Morin, Annie, « Patrimoine religieux : place à la créativité », *Le Soleil*, December 8, 2017, p. 11.

Morin, Lisette, « 'Parée' pour un autre siècle », *Le Progrès du Golfe*, Rimouski, 14 décembre 1967, p.3.

Morissette, Pierre, « Église à conserver », *Le Soleil*, March 2, 2015, p. 17.

Nadeau, Jean-François, « Espoir de réouverture de l'église Saint-Jean-Baptiste à Québec », *Le Devoir*, August 15, 2019, p. A5.

Nadeau, Jean-François, « Le diocèse s'oppose à ce que l'église du Très-Saint-Sacrement soit patrimoniale », *Ici Radio-Canada – Québec*, May 29, 2020, (web), consulted November 2, 2022, <https://Ici.Radio-Canada.ca/nouvelle/1707439/eglise-saint-sacrement-patrimonial-nathalie-roy#:~:text=Le%20dioc%C3%A8se%20de%20Qu%C3%A9bec%20s,la%20ministre%20de%20a%20Culture>.

Nadeau, Jean-François « Québec coupe les fonds pour la préservation des églises », *Le Devoir*, June 18, 2025, (web), consulted February 21, 2026, <https://www.ledevoir.com/politique/quebec/892621/quebec-coupe-fonds-preservation-eglises>

Néron, Jean-François, « De l'argent, pas seulement des prières », *Le Soleil*, June 14, 2018, p. 1,2,3.

Jean-François Néron, « Des paroissiens attristés », *Le Soleil*, February 23, 2015, p. 8.

Néron, Jean-François, « En quête d'une solution miracle », *Le Soleil*, February 23, 2015, p. 8.

Neuman, Scott, "The faithful: both crisis and opportunity as churches close across the country", *National Public Radio*, May 17, 2023, (web), consulted October 4, 2024, <https://www.npr.org/2023/05/17/1175452002/church-closings-religious-affiliation>.

Nicolas, Emilie, « Les mythes et réalités de la loi 21 », *Le Devoir*, August 11, 2022, (web), consulted February 28, 2025, <https://www.ledevoir.com/opinion/chroniques/743721/les-mythes-et-realites-de-la-loi-21>.

Normandin, Pierre-André, « Deux ans pour sauver l'église », *Le Soleil*, December 20, 2004, p. A6.

Note de la rédaction, « De nouveaux visages aux quatre coins de la MRC de Drummond », *L'Express*, 13(35), November 8, 2017, p. 6-8.

Pelchat, André « L'histoire d'un lieu de pèlerinage dans la région : la grotte de Saint-Edmond-de-Grantham », *Raconte-moi l'histoire*, (blog), consulted January 2, 2024, <https://vingt55.ca/la-grotte-de-saint-edmond-de-grantham-lhistoire-dun-lieu-culte-dans-la-region-raconte-moi-lhistoire-par-andre-pelchat/#:~:text=C%3%A9tait%20en%201858.,du%20d%C3%A9but%20du%20XXe%20si%C3%A8cle>.

Pépin, André « Montréal, a-t-elle encore les moyens de s'offrir tant de lieux de culte? », *La Presse*, May 7, 1996, p. A-1 et A-2.

Perreault, Mathieu, « La (suprenante) hausse des baptêmes chez les adultes », *La Presse*, February 9, 2025, (web), consulted February 21, 2026, <https://www.lapresse.ca/actualites/2025-02-09/au-quebec/la-surprenante-hausse-des-baptemes-chez-les-adultes.php#:~:text=L'augmentation%20du%20nombre%20de%20bapt%C3%Aames%20adultes%20s'explique%20aussi,prot%C3%A9ger%20l'identit%C3%A9%20qu%C3%A9bécoise.%20%C2%BB>.

Perron-Langlois, Ariane, « Deux marguilliers quittent une assemblée de la Fabrique pour protester », *Ici Bas-Saint-Laurent*, March 16, 2017, (web), consulted April 8, 2017, <https://Ici.Radio-Canada.ca/nouvelle/1022663/marguilliers-quittent-assemblee-fabrique-cathedrale-rimouski>.

Pichard, Vincent, « La deuxième vie de l'église Saint-Jean-Baptiste », *Ici Radio-Canada – Québec*, April 16, 2022, (web), consulted November 9, 2022, <https://Ici.Radio-Canada.ca/nouvelle/1876756/eglise-saint-jean-baptise-renouveau-avenir-travaux-reparations>.

Plante, Jacques, « Le phare de Saint-Jean-Baptiste s'éteint », *Le Soleil*, February 24, 2015, p. 25.

Porter, Isabelle, « Églises – Ces géantes en quête de vocation », *Le Devoir*, May 6, 2015, p. A1.

Porter, Isabelle, « Un candidat libéral veut sauver l'église Saint-Jean-Baptiste », *Le Devoir*, October 6, 2015, (web), consulted October 26, 2022, <https://www.ledevoir.com/politique/ville-de-Québec/451839/Québec-un-candidat-liberal-veut-sauver-l-eglise-saint-jean-baptiste>.

Proulx, Jean-Pierre, « L'effondrement de l'Église catholique du Québec. Et après ? », *Presence-Info*, April 4, 2024, (web), consulted October 25, 2024, <https://presence-info.ca/article/actualite/religion/leffondrement-de-leglise-catholique-du-Québec-et-apres/>.

Provencher, Normand, « À conserver en entier, avec une vocation artistique », *Le Soleil*, October 1, 2015, p. 16.

Provencher, Normand, « Décès du réputé architecte Jacques Plante », *La Presse* July 5, 2022, (web) consulted July 19, 2023, <https://www.lapresse.ca/arts/2022-07-05/concepteur-de-plusieurs-edifices-culturels/deces-du-repute-architecte-jacques-plante.php>.

Provencher, Normand, « L'abbé prie le gouvernement d'intervenir », *Le Soleil*, February 2, 2015, p. 15.

Provencher, Normand, « Un cortège de 1500 policiers aux funérailles », *Le Soleil*, October 29, 1993, p. A1.

Provencher, Normand, « Une 'corvée' entrepreneuriale pour sauver l'église Saint-Jean-Baptiste », *Le Soleil*, March 22, 2015, p. 14.

Provencher, Normand, « Une campagne citoyenne pour la sauvegarde du bâtiment », *Le Soleil*, May 21, 2015, p. 7.

Racine, Jean-François, « Vandalisme et méfaits à l'intérieur de la cathédrale », *Le Journal de Québec*, March 24, 2021, (web), consulted October 7, 2021, <https://www.journaldeQuébec.com/2021/03/24/la-cathedrale-de-rimouski-vandali>.

Rémillard, David, « Église Saint-Jean-Baptiste : La Ville a échappé une financement majeur », *Ici Radio-Canada – Québec*, September 30, 2021, (web), consulted November 8, 2022, <https://Ici.Radio-Canada.ca/nouvelle/1828294/programme-financement-federal-ville-Québec-eglise-saint-jean-baptiste>.

Rémillard, David, « Église Saint-Jean-Baptiste : le Diocèse rappelle l'urgence d'agir », *Ici-Québec*, April 25, 2023, (web), consulted November 22, 2023, <https://Ici.Radio-Canada.ca/nouvelle/1974233/reactions-projet-conversion-eglise-saint-jean-baptiste-Québec>.

Rémillard, David, « La ville achète l'église Saint-Jean-Baptiste pour 175,000 \$ », September 9, 2024, (web), consulted December 4, 2024, <https://Ici.Radio-Canada.ca/nouvelle/2103012/eglise-saint-jean-baptiste-achat>.

Rémillard, David, « Le ministère de la culture classe l'église du Très-Saint-Sacrement » *Ici Québec*, May 23, 2022, (web), consulted December 4, 2024, <https://Ici.Radio-Canada.ca/nouvelle/1885477/eglise-tres-saint-sacrement-decision-classement-ministere-culture->

[patrimoine#:~:text=il%20comment%C3%A9%20lundi.-,Ferm%C3%A9%20depuis%202019,mena%C3%A7ant%20la%20s%C3%A9curit%C3%A9%20des%20usagers.](#)

Rémillard, David, « Les astres s’alignent pour l’église Saint-Jean-Baptiste », *Ici Radio-Canada – Québec*, March 22, 2022, (web), consulted November 8, 2022, <https://Ici.Radio-Canada.ca/nouvelle/1778821/eglise-saint-jean-baptiste-institut-canadien-Québec-patrimoine-john-porter#:~:text=L'Institut%20est%20actuellement%20en,expliqu%C3%A9%20lors%20d'un%20entretien>.

Rémillard, David, « Les portes de l’église Saint-Jean-Baptiste refermées », *Le Soleil*, May 25, 2015, p. 4.

Rémillard, David, « Patrimoine : Marie-Josée Savard ‘inefficace’ selon un ancien du cabinet Duclos Patrimoine : Marie-Josée Savard ‘inefficace’, selon un ancien du cabinet Duclos » *Ici Radio-Canada – Québec*, October 21, 2021, (web), consulted November 9, 2022, <https://Ici.Radio-Canada.ca/nouvelle/1833532/financement-eglise-saint-jean-baptiste-federal-critiques-marie-jo-savard>.

Rémillard, David, « Patrimoine: tensions entre la Ville et le diocèse, John Porter ‘désabusé’ », *Ici Radio-Canada – Québec*, October 3, 2020, (web), consulted November 2, 2022, <https://Ici.Radio-Canada.ca/nouvelle/1736026/eglise-diocese-patrimoine-religieux-protection-ville-Québec#:~:text=Politique%20municipale-Patrimoine%20%3A%20tensions%20entre%20la%20Ville%20et%20le%20dioc%C3%A8se%20%20John%20Porter,malgr%C3%A9%20tout%2C%20selon%20John%20Porter>.

Ricard-Châtelain, Baptiste, « Toujours rien, quatre ans après la fermeture », *Le Soleil*, April 8, 2019, p. 1, 2.

Richard, Jean, « Les reproches s’accumulent contre Mgr. Grondin », *L’Avantage, Votre journal*, January 23, 2018, (web), consulted April 8, 2021, <https://www.lavantage.qc.ca/article/2018/01/23/les-reproches-s-accumulent-contre-mgr-grondin>.

Rochette, Yannick, « St-Edmond : important projet résidentiel en vue », *Radio Énergie Drummondville*, July 12, 2018, (web), consulted January 21, 2024, <https://www.iheartradio.ca/energie/energie-drummondville/nouvelles/st-edmond-important-projet-residentiel-en-vue-1.4073264>.

Rochon, Yves, « Un combat malavisé contre la loi 21 », *Le Devoir*, November 23, 2020, <https://www.ledevoir.com/opinion/lettres/590364/un-combat-malavise-contre-la-loi-21>.

Roy, Patrice, « L’église à vendre pour 10 000 \$ », *Le téléjournal, Ici-Radio-Canada*, December 7, 2020, (web), consulted January 6, 2025, <https://Ici.Radio-Canada.ca/tele/le-telejournal-18h/site/segments/reportage/212867/massueville-eglise-histoire-patrimoine-menace-a>.

Savard, Marie-Josée, « Église Saint-Jean-Baptiste : la Ville verse 180,000 \$ pour des travaux », *La Bourdon du Faubourg*, November 28, 2018, (web), consulted November 2, 2022,

<https://bourdonmedia.org/2018/11/28/eglise-saint-jean-baptiste-la-ville-verse-180-000-pour-des-travaux/>.

Simpson, Micheline, « Micheline Simpson inquiète au plus haut point pour la cathédrale de Rimouski », *L'Avantage, Votre journal*, June 22, 2018, (web), consulted April 8, 2021.

Strack, Christopher, “Germany: Catholic churches are demolished or repurposed”, *Deutsch Welle*, February 19, 2024, (web), consulted October 4, 2025, <https://www.dw.com/en/germany-catholic-churches-are-demolished-or-repurposed/a-68300577>.

Tadié, Solène, “The ‘Pastoral Council’ and the Collapse of the Catholic Faith in the Netherlands”, *The Catholic Register*, February 1, 2023, (web), consulted October 3, 2024, <https://www.ncregister.com/news/the-pastoral-council-and-the-collapse-of-the-catholic-faith-in-the-netherlands>.

Tees, Philip, “Blågårds Kirke in Nørrebro sold to become a concert venue”, *The Copenhagen Post*, May 1, 2015, (web), consulted October 4, 2024, <https://cphpost.dk/2015-05-01/news/business/blagards-kirke-in-norrebro-sold-to-become-a-concert-venue/>.

Thériault, Carl « Pas de messe de minuit à la cathédrale de Rimouski », *La Presse* December 3, 2014, p. A12.

Thierry Larivière, « De 40 arpents à 1 000 ha. et 140 000 poules » *La Terre de chez nous*, 88(27), July 5, 2017, p. A3.

Tremblay, Julie & Denis Leduc, « Pas de vente ou de don de la cathédrale de Rimouski, dit Mgr. Grondin », *Ici Bas-Saint-Laurent*, April 23, 2018, (web), consulted April 8, 2021, <https://Ici.Radio-Canada.ca/nouvelle/1096809/archeveche-intention-vente-donner-cathedrale-rimouski-denis-grondin.>

Tremblay, Julie, « Cathédrale de Rimouski : l’Archevêché souhaite un règlement à l’amiable », *Ici Radio-Canada – Bas-Saint-Laurent*, September 24, 2019 (web), consulted April 23, 2021, <https://Ici.Radio-Canada.ca/nouvelle/1314923/cathedrale-rimouski-poursuite-fabrique-saint-germain-archeveque-denis-grondin>.

Tremblay, Julie, « Cathédrale de Rimouski : le Regroupement diocésain reprend ses poursuites », *Ici Radio-Canada – Bas-Saint-Laurent*, February 28, 2019, (web), consulted April 2, 2021, https://www.google.com/search?q=Cath%C3%A9drale+de+Rimouski+%3A+le+Regroupement+dioc%C3%A9sain+reprend+ses+poursuites&rlz=1C1CHBF_enCA918CA918&oq=Cath%C3%A9drale+de+Rimouski+%3A+le+Regroupement+dioc%C3%A9sain+reprend+ses+poursuites&aqs=chrome..69i57.895j0j4&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-8.

Tremblay, Julie, « Cathédrale de Rimouski : une fuite d’eau et une nouvelle poursuite », *Ici Radio-Canada – Bas-Saint-Laurent*, (web), consulted April 8, 2021, <https://Ici.Radio-Canada.ca/nouvelle/1165913/cathedrale-eglise-st-germain-rimouski-archeveche-judiciaire-reparations-fabrique>.

Tremblay, Julie, « L'Archevêché nomme un nouveau président à la Fabrique Saint-Germain », *Ici Bas-Saint-Laurent*, December 15, 2021, (web), consulted November 14, 2024, <https://Ici.Radio-Canada.ca/nouvelle/1847386/president-fabrique-saint-germain-cathedrale-rimouski-jean-paul-hepell-jean-charles-lechasseur>

Tremblay, Julie, « L'archevêque de Rimouski souhaite refaire de la cathédrale un lieu de rassemblement », *Ici Bas-Saint-Laurent*, April 11, 2022, (web), consulted November 14, 2024, <https://Ici.Radio-Canada.ca/nouvelle/1875627/cathedrale-saint-germain-rimouski-avenir-mgr-denis-grondin-archeveche-fin-litige-vente-grand-seminaire>.

Tremblay, Julie, « La cathédrale de Rimouski changera de vocation », *Ici Radio-Canada – Bas-Saint-Laurent*, February 6, 2018, (web), consulted April 8, 2021, <https://Ici.Radio-Canada.ca/nouvelle/1151338/cathedrale-rimouski-vocation-transformation-sauvegarde#:~:text=Selon%20Mgr%20Grondin%2C%20le%20projet,cath%C3%A9drale%20Saint%20Germain%20se%20concr%C3%A9tise>.

Tremblay, Julie, « La cathédrale de Rimouski n'est plus chauffée », *Ici Radio-Canada – Bas-Saint-Laurent*, April 2, 2020, (web), consulted, April 23, 2020, <https://Ici.Radio-Canada.ca/nouvelle/1690137/cathedrale-saint-germain-rimouski-travaux-chauffage-entretien>.

Tremblay, Julie, « Le comité Cathédrale 2016 menace de poursuivre la Fabrique Saint-Germain », *Ici Radio-Canada – Est du Québec*, October 13, 2016, (web), consulted March 16, 2021, <http://Ici.Radio-Canada.ca/regions/est-Québec/2016/10/13/004-cathedrale-2016-rimouski-fabrique-archeve-mgr.grondin.shtml>.

Tremblay, Julie, « Les 5 M\$ dans les coffres de l'Archevêché. Ne peuvent pas être utilisées pour la cathédrale », *Ici Radio-Canada – Bas-Saint-Laurent*, November 9, 2017, (web), consulted April 8, 2021, <https://Ici.Radio-Canada.ca/nouvelle/1066257/cathedrale-rimouski-st-germain-archeveche-renovation>.

Tremblay, Julie, « Les consultations sur l'avenir de la cathédrale sont lancées », April 25, 2017, (web), consulted April 8, 2021, <https://Ici.Radio-Canada.ca/nouvelle/1030059/les-consultations-sur-lavenir-de-la-cathedrale-sont-lancees#:~:text=Plus%20de%20deux%20ans%20apr%C3%A8s,avenir%20viennent%20d'%C3%AAtre%20lanc%C3%A9es.&text=Les%20consultations%20se%20tiendront%20jusqu,se%20d%C3%A9rouleront%20en%20deux%20phases>.

Tremblay, Julie, « Les pouvoirs des bénévoles de l'Archevêché restreints ... par les règles de l'Archevêché », *Ici Radio-Canada – Bas-Saint-Laurent*, June 4, 2019, (web), consulted April 8, 2021, <https://Ici.Radio-Canada.ca/nouvelle/1173335/cathedrale-rimouski-st-germain-fabrique-eglise-vocation-culte-chicane>.

Tremblay, Julie, « Plus de 600 personnes réunies pour l'avenir de la cathédrale », *Ici Radio-Canada – Est du Québec*, September 7, 2016, (web), consulted March 16, 2021, <https://Ici.Radio-Canada.ca/nouvelle/801455/cathedrale-rimouski-avenir-assemblee-publique>.

Tremblay, Julie, « Un nouveau comité se penchera sur l'avenir de la cathédrale Saint-Germain », *Ici Radio-Canada – Bas-Saint-Laurent*, November 26, 2019, (web), consulted April 23, 2021, <https://Ici.Radio-Canada.ca/nouvelle/1404254/cathedrale-st-germain-avenir-rimouski-archeveche-projet-transformation>.

Tremblay, Michel-Félix, « Cathédrale de Rimouski : L'Archidiocèse s'entend avec 2 des 4 marguilliers », *Ici Bas-Saint-Laurent*, November 2, 2021, (web), consulted November 14, 2024, <https://Ici.Radio-Canada.ca/nouvelle/1836618/cathedrale-rimouski-entente-avenir-marguiller-archidiocese>.¹

Tremblay, Michel-Félix, « Cathédrale de Rimouski : un contrat soulève des tensions à l'archevêché », *Ici Bas-Saint-Laurent*, June 23, 2020, (web), consulted January 2, 2021, <https://Ici.Radio-Canada.ca/nouvelle/1712539/diocese-rimouski-conseil-economique-monseigneur-mgrondin-cathedrale-charge-projet#:~:text=Cath%C3%A9drale%20de%20Rimouski%20%3A%20un%20contrat%20soul%3%A8ve%20des%20tensions%20%C3%A0%20l'Archev%C3%AAch%C3%A9,-Les%20membres%20du&text=L'embauche%20d'un%20charg%C3%A9,de%20Rimouski%2C%20monseigneur%20Denis%20Grondin>.

Tremblay, Michel-Félix, « Mgr. Grondin prêt à sacrifier l'archevêché pour sauver la cathédrale », March 30, 2021, (web) consulted October 7, 2021, <https://Ici.Radio-Canada.ca/nouvelle/1781031/cathedrale-rimouski-patrimoine-sauvegarde-grondin>.

Tremblay, Michel-Félix, « Tentative d'entente avortée dans le dossier de la cathédrale », *Ici Bas-Saint-Laurent*, July 12, 2021, (web), consulted October 7, 2021, <https://Ici.Radio-Canada.ca/nouvelle/1808472/fabrique-cathedrale-litige-amiable-annulation-lechasseur-proces-archeveche-rimouski>.

Trudel, Robert, « Panthéon Saint-Jean-Baptiste », *Le Soleil*, July 6, 2016, p. 21.

Turmel, Gilles, « Rénovations majeures pour une église de Rimouski », *Le Journal de Québec*, May 29, 2020, (web), consulted May 5, 2021, journaldeQuebec.com/2020/05/29/renovations-majeures-pour-une-eglise-de-rimouski-1.

Twain, Mark, “Mark Twain in Montreal”, *The New York Times*, December 10, 1881.

Vachon, François, « L'église Saint-Jean-Baptiste est à vendre », *Le Soleil*, September 2, 2004, p. A3.

Vaillancourt, Philippe, « L'église Saint-Jean-Baptiste de Québec fermera le 24 mai », *Presence-info*, February 19, 2015, (web), consulted August 27, 2022, <https://www.cath.ch/newsf/Québec-leglise-saint-jean-baptiste-fermera-ses-portes-le-24-mai/>.

Van't Hof, Jurgén, “Herbestemmen: maatschappelijk of monumentaal probleem?”, *Jaarboek Monumentenzorg*, 1999, p. 17–26.

Verge, Béatrice, « Propos de la rédaction : Pour un patrimoine démocratisé », *Continuité*, Autumn, 1983, p. 4.

Villeneuve, Alix, « Les Rimouskois ont l’embarrass du choix », *Le Journal de Québec*, p. 48.

Wells, Ernie, « Une vente qui libère le président de la Fabrique », *Progrès-Echo*, July 5, 2009, p. 3.

Wilsher, Kim, “Notre-Dame €1 bn fund pits Paris against provinces”, *The Guardian*, April 20, 2019, (web), accessed 17 May 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/apr/20/notre-dame-1bn-fund-pits-paris-against-provinces-gilets-jaunes-macron>.

Reports and Archival Sources :

« À propos : historique », Conseil du patrimoine religieux du Québec, 2024, (web), consulted October 25, 2024, <https://www.patrimoine-religieux.qc.ca/fr/aide-financiere>.

« Aide Financière », Conseil de Patrimoine Religieux du Québec, 2019, (web), consulted 6 July 2019; <http://www.patrimoine-religieux.qc.ca/fr/aide-financiere>.

« Aide financière », Conseil du patrimoine religieux du Québec, 2025, (web), consulted February 28, 2025, <https://www.patrimoine-religieux.qc.ca/fr/aide-financiere>.

« Annexe 2, Pour assurer la poursuite de la mission de la paroisse St-Germain : Rapport du Comité aviseur », Saint-Germain-de-Rimouski Parish Advisory Committee, November 8, 2014, p. 28, 32, (web), consulted April 8, 2020, http://www.diocesarimouski.com/riki/pdf/rapport_comite_aviseur_2014-annexes.pdf.

“Closed Churches”, The Church of England, 2024, (web), consulted October 3, 2024, <https://www.churchofengland.org/resources/parish-reorganisation-and-church-property/closed-churches#:~:text=A%20small%20number%20of%20churches,new%20uses%20for%20these%20buildings>.

« Communiqué de presse: projets pour l’avenir de la cathédrale de Rimouski », Archdiocese of Rimouski, October 16, 2017, (web), consulted April 8, 2021, http://www.diocesarimouski.com/consultation/communiqu_e_2017-10-16.pdf.

« Depuis 2018, 64 paroisses au lieu de 130 au sein du Diocèse de Québec », Église catholique du Québec, January 18, 2018, (web), consulted 13 January 2019, <https://www.ecdq.org/depuis-2018-64-paroisses-au-lieu-de-130-au-sein-du-diocese-de-Québec/>.

« Extrait du procès-verbal de la 599^e réunion de l’Assemblée de fabrique », Saint-Jean-Baptiste Parish Assembly, Rectory Conference Room, February 16, 2015.

« L’avenir de la cathédrale Saint-Germain de Rimouski : Rapport d’analyse d’un sondage téléphonique auprès des Rimouskois », Léger, May 10, 2017, (web), consulted April 8, 2021. http://www.diocesarimouski.com/consultation/rapports/rapport_sondage_leger_%202017.pdf.

« Les fabriques en 2014, Mémo-AF », Département des fabriques de l’Église catholique de Québec, 13(1), May 2015, p.1., (web), consulted August 7, 2022, https://fabriques.ecdq.org/wp-content/uploads/memo_af_juin_2015.pdf

« Les pierres vivantes de Saint-Pierre-Apôtre, mémoire déposé au gouvernement du Québec à la commission parlementaire sur le patrimoine religieux », La communauté chrétienne de Saint-Pierre-Apôtre, Autumn 2005, (web), consulted February 28, 2025, <https://www.assnat.qc.ca/fr/travaux-parlementaires/commissions/cc-37-1/journal-debats/CC-050920.html>.

« Mémoire sur l’avenir du patrimoine religieux », Conseil de Quartier Saint-Jean-Baptiste, September 14, 2005.

« Nombre de paroisses catholique en France », La Conférence des Évêques de France, (web), consulted 13 January 2019, <https://eglise.catholique.fr/guide-eglise-catholique-france/statistiques-de-leglise-catholique-france-monde/statistiques-de-leglise-catholique-france/454033-454033/>.

« Patrimoine religieux du Québec : réponse à la consultation générale de la commission de la culture de l'Assemblée Nationale du Québec », Assemblée des Évêques du Québec, August 31, 2005.

« Plan d'urbanisme », Le Conseil de la municipalité de Saint-Edmond-de-Grantham, 2021, p. 16, (web), consulted January 21, 2024, <https://www.st-edmond-de-grantham.qc.ca/file-9717>.

« Pour assurer la poursuite de la MISSION de la paroisse St-Germain », Saint-Germain-de-Rimouski Parish Advisory Committee, November 8, 2014, (web), consulted May 6, 2021, http://www.diocesisrimouski.com/riki/pdf/rapport_comite_aviseur_2014.pdf.

« Premier colloque international sur l'Avenir des biens d'Église », Conference Proceedings, Montreal, l'Université de Montréal, October 19-22, 2005.

« Rapport Annuel 2016-2017 », Conseil de patrimoine religieux du Québec, 2017, (web), consulted May 17, 2019, <https://www.patrimoine-religieux.qc.ca/fr/publications/rapport-annuel>.

« Rapport Annuel: 2002-2003 », Fondation du patrimoine religieux du Québec », 2003, p. 25, (web), consulted August 8, 2022, file:///C:/Users/rlux0/Downloads/2002_2003_FPRO_Rapport_annuel2.pdf.

« Résumé du mémoire soumis par l'Assemblée de fabrique de la paroisse Saint-Jean-Baptiste », Saint-Jean-Baptiste Parish Assembly, August 30, 2005, p. 3, (web), consulted August 12, 2022, <http://www.assnat.qc.ca/en/travaux-parlementaires/commissions/CC/mandats/Mandat-3163/memoires-deposes.html>.

« Statistiques globales du Diocèse de Rimouski depuis 1946 », Catholic Hierarchy, (web), consulted February 28, 2025, <https://www.catholic-hierarchy.org/diocese/drimo.html>.

« Vision du patrimoine 2027 : préserver, enrichir, transmettre », Ville de Québec, 2017, (web), consulted November 1, 2022, https://www.ville.Quebec.qc.ca/publications/docs_ville/vision_patrimoine.pdf.

Blanchet, Bertrand, « Réaménagements du secteur pastoral de Rimouski », conférence de presse, Archevêché de Rimouski, 25 avril 2006, (web) consulted, May 5, 2020, <http://www.paroissebet.ca/pdf/ream-riki-07-04.pdf>.

Boivin, Guy, private letter to Abbé Pierre Gingras, priest of Saint-Jean-Baptiste Parish, Parish archives February 19, 2015.

Cabinet Guy Bertrand, « Comité de sauvegarde de la Cathédrale de Rimouski v. Procureur général du Québec, Ville de Rimouski, L'Archevêque catholique romain de Saint-Germain de Rimouski, Fabrique de la paroisse Saint-Germain de Rimouski, Saint-Siège et Sa Sainteté le pape François 1^{er} », Formal Notice, September 6, 2018.

Canadian Conference of Bishops, *Catholic Church Directory*, Novalis, editions 1960-2025.

Caron, Robert, « Mémoire déposée par la Ville de Québec », Commission de la culture, September 2005, p. 6, (web), consulted August 12, 2022, <http://www.assnat.qc.ca/en/travaux-parlementaires/commissions/CC/mandats/Mandat-3163/memoires-deposes.html>, original : « un trésor à faire connaître et à utiliser pour la nouvelle évangélisation ».

Chagnon, Philippe, « Annexe 1 : Diapositives de la présentation de M. Philippe Chagnon, marguillier », Saint-Jean-Baptiste Parish Assembly, Parish archives, February 18, 2015.

Coalition Avenir Québec, « 24 M\$ pour la protection de notre patrimoine bâti », Press Release, June 28, 2022, (web), consulted February 28, 2025, <https://coalitionavenirQuebec.org/fr/blog/2022/06/28/24-m-pour-la-protection-de-notre-patrimoine-bati/>.

Comité diocésain du Patrimoine religieux, « Résumé : Mémoire du Comité diocésain du patrimoine religieux de l'Église catholique de Québec », Diocese of Quebec, September 2005, p. 8, (web), consulted August 12, 2022, <http://www.assnat.qc.ca/en/travaux-parlementaires/commissions/CC/mandats/Mandat-3163/memoires-deposes.html>.

Cyprien Lacroix, Gérald, « Allocution de Monsieur Gérald Cyprien Lacroix, Archevêque de Québec, Primat du Canada », Séminaire de Québec, September 20, 2016, (web), consulted November 1, 2022, file:///C:/Users/rlux0/Downloads/2016-09-20_allocution_patrimoine-religieux%20cyprien.pdf.

Emond, Richard & Ruth Parisé, « Pétition: Sauvons le bâtiment, patrimonial, de l'église Saint-Jean-Baptiste », presented to Abbé Pierre Gingras, May 20, 2015, accessed from the Parish archives.

ERS Research and Consultancy, "National Heritage Memorial Fund: Listed Places of Worship Roof Repair Fund Evaluation – Final Report", National Heritage Memorial Fund, April 2017, (web), consulted 13 January 2019, http://www.nhmf.org.uk/sites/default/files/RRF%20Project%20Evaluation%20Final%20Report%20May%202017_0.pdf.

Fortin, Jean-François, « Compte rendu des rencontres des paroissien(ne)s de Saint-Jean-Baptiste tenues les mardi 28 avril 2015 de 19h à 20h15 et mercredi 29 avril 2015 de 14h à 15h30 au sous-sol de l'église Saint-Jean-Baptiste et présidées par M. l'abbé Pierre Gingras, curé », Saint-Jean-Baptiste Parish Assembly, April 30, 2015.

Fournier, Pierre-André, « Lettre de Mgr. Pierre-André Fournier adressée aux diocésains et diocésaines », Rimouski, Diocese of Rimouski, January 1, 2014.

Gingras, Pierre, « Homélie de la messe de fermeture au culte de l'église Saint-Jean-Baptiste », May 24, 2015, Saint-Jean-Baptiste Church, Québec City, (web), consulted October 31, 2022, <https://www.ecdq.org/homelie-de-la-messe-de-fermeture-au-culte-de-leglise-saint-jean-baptiste/>.

Gray, Mark M., Mary L. Gautier, & Melissa A. Cidade. "The changing face of US Catholic parishes. A Report produced for the Emerging Models of Pastoral Leadership Project", National Association for Lay Ministry, 2011, p. 6, (web), consulted 13 January 2019, <https://nalm.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/Changing-Face-of-US-Catholic-Parishes.pdf>.

Grondin, Denis, « Communiqué », Archdiocese of Rimouski, April 25, 2017, (web), consulted April 8, 2021, http://www.diocesisrimouski.com/consultation/conference_presse2017-04-25.pdf.

Grondin, Denis, « Dossier cathédrale de Rimouski : L'archevêque décrète l'érection d'une nouvelle paroisse », Office of the Archbishop, April 20, 2018, (web), consulted April 8, 2021, <http://www.diocesisrimouski.com/ch/dec/st-germain2018.pdf>.

Lavoie, Michel, « Analyse financière des scénarios de fermetures d'églises », Rimouski, Paroisse Saint-Germain de Rimouski, 2014.

Macron, Emmanuel, @EmmanuelMacron, Twitter, 15 April 2019, (web), consulted 17 May 2019, <https://twitter.com/EmmanuelMacron/status/1117851407644684288>.

Ministère d'Affaires municipales et d'Habitation, « Élections municipales 2017 : Résultats pour les postes de maires et de conseillers », November 2017, (web), consulted January 20, 2024, https://www.mamh.gouv.qc.ca/organisation-mun/cipale/democratie-mun/cipale/statistiques-et-archives-des-resultats-des-elections-mun/cipales/elections-mun/cipales-2017/resultats-des-elections-pour-les-postes-de-maire-et-de-conseiller/?tx_txmamrotelections2017_pi1%5Bmun_text%5D=Saint-Edmond-de-Grantham+%2849100%29&tx_txmamrotelections2017_pi1%5Bmun%5D=49100.

Noppen, Luc & Lucie k. Morisset, « Lieux de culte situés sur le territoire de la Ville de Québec », Quebec City, Service de l'urbanisme, Division du design urbain et du patrimoine, 1994.

Pelchat, Marc, « La cathédrale Saint-Germain de Rimouski et son avenir : Confiance et audace », Rimouski, Diocese of Rimouski, November 30, 2018, (web), consulted April 8, 2021, p. 2, http://www.diocesisrimouski.com/riki/pdf/avenir_cathedrale_rimouski.pdf.

Québec, « Inventaire des lieux de culte au Québec », Ministry of Culture and Communications », 2004, (web) consulted 16 May 2019, <http://www.patrimoine-culturel.gouv.qc.ca/rpcq/detailInventaire.do?methode=consulter&id=4&type=inv#.XN2DQehKjMU>.

Québec, « Patrimoine culturel à caractère religieux - Près de 35 M\$ pour la protection du patrimoine religieux québécois », Press Release, September 21, 2023, (web), consulted February 28, 2025.

Quebec, Assemblée Nationale, Commission de la culture, 37^e législature, 1^{re} session, 38(59), November 3, 2005.

Québec, Assemblée Nationale, Journal des débats de la commission sur la culture, 37^e législature, 1^{er} Session, (4 juin 2003 au 10 mars 2006), 38(50), September 20, 2005.

Québec, *F-1 Loi sur des fabriques*, 1965, 1st session.

Quebec, National Assembly, « Croire au patrimoine religieux du Québec », Ministère de la Culture et des Communications, 2006, (web), consulted February 28, 2025, https://bibliotheque.cecile-rouleau.gouv.qc.ca/documents/archives/pgq/A11A8_C76_2006.pdf.

Roy, Gérald, « Mémoire présenté au Comité de consultation », Consultation sur l'avenir de la cathédrale, May 30, 2017, p. 5., (web), consulted May 6, 2021, <http://www.diocesisrimouski.com/consultation/memoires/cc-m007.pdf>.

Roy, Gérald, « Vitalité des communautés », Paroisse Saint-Germain de Rimouski, October 2014, (web), consulted May 6, 2021, http://www.diocesisrimouski.com/riki/pdf/rapport_comite_aviseur_2014-annexes2.pdf.

Statistics Canada, “Census Profile: City of Rimouski”, 2016, (web), consulted February 28, 2025, <https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/dp-pd/prof/details/page.cfm?Lang=E&Geo1=CSD&Code1=2410043&Geo2=POPC&Code2=0709&SearchText=rimouski&SearchType=Begin&SearchPR=01&B1=All&TABID=1&type=0>.

Statistics Canada, “Community Profiles: Saint-Edmond-de-Grantham”, (web), consulted January 2, 2024, <https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2021/dp-pd/prof/details/page.cfm?Lang=E&SearchText=Saint%2DEdmond%2Dde%2DGrantham&DGUIDlist=2021A00052449100&GENDERlist=1,2,3&STATISTIClist=1&HEADERlist=0>.

Statistics Canada, « Distribution (en pourcentage) des groupes religieux, Québec, 2011 et 2021 », 2022, (web), consulted February 2022, <https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2021/as-sa/fogs-spg/alternative.cfm?topic=10&lang=F&dguid=2021A000224&objectId=2>.

Statistics Denmark (Danmarks Statistik), “2023: Members of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Denmark ([Medlemmer af folkekirken](#))”, 2023, (web), accessed October 4, 2024, <https://www.dst.dk/da/Statistik/emner/borgere/folkekirke/medlemmer-af-folkekirken>.

Statistics Denmark (Danmarks Statistik), “2023: Members of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Denmark ([Medlemmer af folkekirken](#))”, 2023, (web), accessed October 4, 2024, <https://www.dst.dk/da/Statistik/emner/borgere/folkekirke/medlemmer-af-folkekirken>.

The Canadian Conference of Bishops, *Canadian Catholic Church Directory*, Montreal, Novalis, 2025.

The Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Canadian Catholic Church Directory*, Montreal: Novalis, editions 2006-2021.

Turmel, Claude, « Restaurer avec l'esprit du petit propriétaire », Montréal, archevêché, January 1990.

Vignola, Kurt, « L'avenir de la cathédrale de Rimouski : Rapport de la consultation menée au printemps 2017 sur l'acceptabilité sociale des usages et des projets liés à l'avenir de la cathédrale

de Rimouski », June 19, 2017, (web), consulted April 8, 2021,
https://www.academia.edu/36790740/Lavenir_de_la_cath%C3%A9drale_de_Rimouski.

Villeneuve, Jean-Marie-Rodrigue, « Communiqué de son éminence : Constitution du Comité diocésain d'action liturgique et des cérémonies, de la musique et des arts sacrés », *Semaine religieuse de Québec*, Vol. 49, No.23, February 4, 1937, p. 355-360.

Formal Interviews:

Saint-Germain-de-Rimouski

Interview, Abbé Gérald Roy by Ryan Lux, February 6, 2020, 93 mins.

Interview, Abbé Guy Lagacé by Ryan Lux, February 6, 2020. 105 mins.

Interview, Éric Forest by Ryan Lux, February 25, 2020, 59 mins.

Interview, Gilles Le Chasseur by Ryan Lux, February 3, 2020, 140 mins.

Interview, Jean-Charles Lechasseur by Ryan Lux, February 7, 2020, 203 mins.

Interview, Kurt Vignola by Ryan Lux, February 4, 2020. 125 mins.

Interview, Luc Noppen by Ryan Lux, October 23, 2020. 138 mins.

Interview, Marc Parent by Ryan Lux, February 4, 2020, 45 mins.

Interview, Pascal Gagnon by Ryan Lux, February 6, 2020, 47 mins.

Interview, Jacques Landry by Ryan Lux, February 7, 2020, 74 mins.

Saint-Jean-Baptiste

Interview, Abbé Pierre Gingras by Ryan Lux, 66 mins., 75, mins.

Interview, Carole Jacques-Savaria by Ryan Lux, July 10, 2020, 45 mins.

Interview, Richard Édmon, by Ryan Lux, July, 10, 2020, 70 mins.

Interview, Jacques Plante by Ryan Lux, July 10, 2020, 64 mins.

Interview, Jean Rousseau by Ryan Lux, July 8, 2020., 37 mins.

Interview, Jean-François Fortin by Ryan Lux, July 10, 2020, 70 mins.

Interview, Louis Dumoulin by Ryan Lux, July 8, 2020, 80 mins.

Interview Sebastion Lavoie by Ryan Lux, July 10, 2020, 70 mins.

Interview Philippe Chagnon by Ryan Lux, July 6, 2020, 61 mins.

Saint-Edmond-Grantham

Interview, Abbé Gilles Dubois by Ryan Lux, September 14, 2020, 75 mins.

Interview, Aliette Lajoie by Ryan Lux, September 15, 2020, 72 mins.

Interview, Ginette Letendre by Ryan Lux, September 18, 2020, 83 mins.

Interview, Jean-Claude Paradis by Ryan Lux, September 15, 2020, 76 mins.

Interview, Mgr. Simon Héroux by Ryan Lux, September 17, 2020, 66 mins.

Interview, Michel Côté by Ryan Lux, September 14, 2020, 76 mins.

Interview, Reynald Girard by Ryan Lux, September 17, 2020, 40 mins.

Non-cited formal Interviews

Interview, Phyllis Lambert by Ryan Lux, Montréal, October 29, 2020, 50 mins

Interview, Jenny Duhaime by Ryan lux, Montréal, October 19, 2020. 90 mins.

Interview, Carole Poirier by Ryan Lux, Montréal, October 18, 2020, 90 mins.

Interview, Pierre Côté by Ryan Lux, Montréal, October 21, 2020. 76 :00.

Interview, Serge Joyal, Montréal, October 15, 2020, 1 :12 :00 mins.

Interview, William Gaudry, Montréal, October 13, 2020, 50 :00 mins.

Interview, Georges Lévesque, Rimouski, February 4, 2020, 68 mins

Interview, Raymond Garneau, Rimouski, February 4, 2020, 93 mins.

Interview Jean-Claude Roy, Rimouski, February 4, 2020, 120 mins.