

**Agriculturalism, A Dogma of the Church
in Quebec: Myth or Reality?
A Review of the Years 1896-1914¹**

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What was the attitude of the clergy in Quebec and what attitude did they communicate to their people towards industrialization and urbanization, over which French Canadians had so little control, especially in Montreal, where both capital and industry were almost exclusively in Anglo-Saxon Protestant hands? This question is important, for it has been repeatedly stated in recent times, that the Church in the past has been hostile to industry and industrialization, that for a century now the clergy along with the vast "majority of Quebec intellectuals have been "agriculturalists." For example, the English Canadian sociologist, John Porter, in *The Vertical Mosaic*, generalizes concerning the clergy in Quebec,

Quebec's hierarchy assumed a reactionary attitude to the industrialization of the province ... Quebec's industrialization was a tide to be stemmed because it was seen as a threat to French national survival. The solution to the question of national survival became confused with the solution to the problems of industrialization. The solution was expressed in a clerical-national creed: Those who had not left the village should remain there, and those who had left should return.²

The French Canadian historian, Michel Brunet, is more specific. He writes,

Tous les principaux dirigeants de la société québécoise, dans les milieux laïcs et ecclésiastiques, ont adhéré avec enthousiasme, unanimité et crédulité à tous les enseignements et à toutes les illusions de l'agriculturalisme. Seule une très petite minorité tenta à réagir.³

It is easy to establish that the clergy were avid promoters of agriculture. Indeed, there was a time when J. C. Chapais, a man well acquainted with the history of agriculture in Quebec, could champion the thesis that "dans notre province, tout ce qui s'est fait de beau, de grand, de bon, en agriculture et en

¹ This theme is developed in much greater detail in the author's forthcoming book, William F. Ryan, *The Clergy and Economic Growth in Quebec* (Québec: Presses Université Laval, 1966) to appear in August 1966.

² John Porter, *The Vertical Mosaic* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1965), p. 333.

³ Michel Brunet, "Trois dominantes de la pensée canadienne-française l'agriculturalisme, l'anti-étatisme, et le messianisme. Essai d'histoire intellectuelle," *Ecrits du Canada français*, III (1957), p. 45.

colonisation, comme, d'ailleurs, en bien d'autre chose, s'est fait par l'influence, sous la direction et l'initiative de la religion.⁴

But an agriculturalist is not merely a promoter of agriculture, he is primarily an opponent to any notable change in the status quo and so is inevitably opposed to industrialization and urbanization. Brunet defines agriculturalism as a philosophy of life and a reaction against the materialism and technology of the present day.

L'agriculturalisme est avant tout une façon générale de penser, une philosophie de la vie qui idéalise le passé, condamne le présent et se méfie de l'ordre social moderne. C'est un refus de l'âge industriel contemporain qui s'inspire d'une conception statique de la société. Les agriculturalistes soutiennent que le monde occidental s'égaré en s'engageant dans la voie de la technique et de la machine. Ils dénoncent le matérialisme de notre époque et prétendent que les générations précédentes vivaient dans un climat spiritualisé. Selon eux, l'âge d'or de l'humanité aurait été celui où l'immense majorité de la population s'occupait à la culture du sol. Avec nostalgie et émoi, ils rappellent le geste auguste du semeur.⁵

Brunet, who believes that Quebec is still an "underdeveloped" region from the point of view of economic equipment, explains the fact that some industrialization did come about by claiming that the propaganda of the agriculturalists "n'a pas, heureusement, empêché les lois économiques de fonctionner," and that the heed paid these prophets by the politicians was not so servile as to prevent them from opening the province wide to foreign capitalists.⁶

A full investigation of this thesis would take us far afield. Here we can only investigate whether this "agriculturalist" attitude was as universal among the clergy during the pre-war economic spurt as is sometimes claimed.

The most compact and forceful embodiment of the so-called "agriculturalist" attitude in this period seems to be in the oftquoted sermon of Abbé (later Monsignor) Louis Paquet, preached on June 23, 1902, during the celebrations of the 50th anniversary of University Laval. His theme was "La vocation de la race française en Amérique," and he identifies that vocation as the fostering of religion and thought:

Notre mission est moins de manier des capitaux que de remuer des idées;
elle consiste moins à allumer le feu des usines qu'à entretenir et à faire

⁴ J. C. Chapais, "Religion, agriculture, colonisation," *Courrier du Canada*, December 23, 1899. Incorporated into *Rapport du congrès de la colonisation, tenu à Montréal les 22-24 novembre 1898*, p. 243. Chapais, a former cabinet minister, had also held several positions directly related to the promotion of better agriculture, including that of assistant superintendent of the experimental farm in Ottawa.

⁵ Michel Brunet, "Trois dominantes de la pensée canadienne-française l'agriculturalisme, l'anti-étatisme, et le messianisme. Essai d'histoire intellectuelle," *Ecrits du Canada français*, III (1957), p. 43.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 58.

rayonner au loin le foyer lumineux de la religion et de la pensée ...

And again,

Pendant que nos rivaux revendiquent, sans doute dans des luttes courtoises, l'hégémonie de l'industrie et de la finance, nous ambitionnerons avant tout l'honneur de la doctrine et les palmes de l'apostolat.⁷

The sermon has been often interpreted as an attempt by Abbé Paquet to steer his fellow French Canadians away from playing their rightful role in industry. This is a possible interpretation. It is also plausible to interpret it as a rationalization of the poor showing which his fellow countrymen were making in the new wave of industrialization. And again, it is possible to see in it merely an eloquent plea on the part of a priest who earnestly wishes to remind his people of that age-old teaching of Christ that riches can never be an ultimate goal, but only a means to higher values. Later in his sermon, Abbé Paquet says that he does not want his audience to think that he is preaching “un renoncement fatal” of the new age of progress, which he then proceeds to describe in equally glowing language. He concludes, “La richesse n'est interdite à aucun peuple ni à aucune race; elle est même la récompense d'initiatives fécondes, d'efforts intelligents et de travaux persévérants.” But his deep concern is that a thirst for gold and pleasure may deaden their noble aspirations and that gross materialism may rivet them to material things. And he goes on to counsel them how to use this new wealth and progress, in which he obviously assumes they intend to share fully:

Usons des biens matériels, non pour eux-mêmes, mais pour les biens plus précieux qu'ils peuvent nous assurer; usons de la richesse, non pour multiplier les vils plaisirs des sens, mais pour favoriser les plaisirs plus nobles, plus élevés de l'âme; usons du progrès, non pour nous étoiler dans le béotisme qu'engendre trop souvent l'opulence, mais pour donner à nos cœurs un plus vigoureux élan.⁸

Rhetoric apart, Abbé Paquet seems here to be merely spelling out that qualification of “veritable” or “vrai,” which the bishops always add when they claim that the Church and they themselves favour and are actively working to

⁷ Mgr L. A. Paquet, *Le bréviaire du patriote canadien-français* (Montréal Bibliothèque de l'Action française, 1925), pp. 52, 59. One reason why this sermon is well known by contemporary French Canadians is that 23 years after it was preached it was re-published by Canon Chartier and was later often studied in the classical colleges as embodying the French Canadian nationalistic preoccupations that dominated their thinking in the twenties and the thirties. In my extensive reading in the pre-1914 literature I have found it quoted verbatim only once (see *L'Enseignement primaire, 1906-1907*), p. 218.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 57. In the case of Abbé Paquet personally, there seems little doubt that in his later writings he indulged fully in the agriculturalist theme. In 1917, he clearly stated that he was very concerned that there were people who were trying to uproot the French Canadian soul and bend it towards a new destiny (Mgr L. A. Paquet, *Etudes et appréciations; mélanges canadiens*, (Québec: Imprimerie Franciscaine Missionnaire, 1918), pp. VI-VII.

promote progress.⁹ For the rest, it is not particularly surprising that French Canadians, like their French ancestors, should despise what they regard as the grubbing materialistic ways of the Anglo-Saxon and of his American cousin!

It is, of course, one thing stoutly to refuse to make a god of riches but quite another deliberately to refuse industrialization and the consequent urbanization in favour of agriculture. Yet this is the accusation often made against the Quebec clergy. Is it sound?

Quebec had long suffered from the problem of surplus population, which forced hundreds of thousands of French Canadians to emigrate to the United States. The clergy as well as many politicians soon came to realize that the opening of new areas for settlement and the improvement of agriculture were urgently required not only as the necessary economic base of the province, but also as an essential condition of the survival of the French Canadians as a separate ethnic group – and hence also of their Catholic religion, which they had come to consider as almost inherently dependent in the maintenance of their French language and culture as a bulwark against Anglo-Saxon Protestantism. Only by rapidly increasing their voting power in the Confederation could they defend their minority rights in view of the endless flood of non-French immigrants now pouring into Canada. Inevitably, watch-words and clichés entered the French Canadian vocabulary and came to be mouthed at the slightest provocation. Among them were such phrases as, “Emparons-nous du sol” (this saying was first attributed to George-Etienne Cartier, who as well as being one of the chief architects of Confederation was also involved in railway expansion); “Nous sommes essentiellement une race de terriens”; “La mission du Canadien français est d’être agriculteur”; “Ne l’oublions jamais: avant tout, ce qui nous enrichira, c’est la charrue.”¹⁰ If emigration was to be stopped and if the people were to be kept on the land, farming had to be made into a successful vocation and the people had to be taught to attach a certain prestige value to an occupation vital for the causes of both race and religion. In fact, the bishops had assigned a group of priests the special role of colonization and agricultural missionaries to carry out this work, often at the request of the government, which at times paid some of them a regular salary. In 1894, Bishop Bégin spelt out clearly to his agricultural missionaries what they were to teach the farmers:

⁹ See, for example, Mgr Cloutier, “Le véritable progrès,” *Le Bien Public*, January 3, 1911; or “Lettre pastorale de Nos Seigneurs les Archevêques des Provinces Ecclésiastiques de Québec, Montréal et d’Ottawa,” March 19, 1894), where the bishops maintain that the Church not only does not oppose but emphatically favours “tous les progrès bien entendus.” As Father Lalande, S.J., expressed it in his lecture at Trois-Rivières (*Le Bien Public*, November 30, 1909) and repeated it often elsewhere in the province, the French Canadians should not set an upper limit to their pursuit of riches, “car là comme ailleurs, il n’est jamais bon de rester volontairement au second rang quand on peut être au premier,” provided only that they are ever mindful of “la noblesse de nos origines sur cette terre d’Amérique.”

¹⁰ *L’Action sociale*, March 18, 1909; June 3 and July 14, 1911.

Il s'efforcera de faire aimer l'agriculture, d'en faire ressortir la noblesse, les avantages, la supériorité sur les diverses professions libérales et sur les différents métiers et industries; et cela à divers points de vue: au point de vue matériel, au point de vue de la famille, et au point de vue national.¹¹

And so, over the next two decades, even though the bishops themselves scarcely ever referred directly to agriculture in their official statements and were more immediately preoccupied with a new set of problems arising out of rapid industrialization, this group of zealous missionaries continued in times of prosperity as in times of recession to preach the gospel of agriculture and colonization. The Catholic press took up the cause every now and then, especially each year about the time of the annual convention of these missionaries, or when the question of agriculture or of colonization came up for discussion in the legislature. On these occasions, the editors usually fell back briefly on the various clichés mentioned above. But for the rest, they were content to devote a section of their paper to agriculture in which though preaching occasionally occurs, it is obviously meant only to encourage the farmers or settlers. When economic reasoning is invoked, as it is on rare occasions, it invariably has a physiocratic flavour.

For example, Abbé Michaud reasons as follows: agriculture is the basis of the nation's riches; unlike commerce, agriculture and industry are productive, yet agriculture has this advantage over both the others, for "Quant au commerce et à l'industrie, ils travaillent sur des matières existantes, tandis que l'agriculture travaille pour produire ce qui n'existe pas."¹² And he manages so to reconstruct history as to be able to draw the pertinent universal lesson that the prosperity and happiness of a nation are in direct relation to the number and prosperity of its farmers. Michaud, like his fellow agriculturalist, Abbé Georges Dugas, who is fond of citing Sully to the effect that agriculture and grazing are the breasts of France,¹³ fears lest the necessary equilibrium between production and consumption be endangered, since productivity in agriculture is not keeping pace

¹¹ Mgr Bégin, "Notes à l'usage des missionnaires agricoles," *Mandements, Lettres Pastorales, Circulaires* (Quebec, August 1894), p. 177.

¹² Abbé Michaud, *L'agriculture et l'état agricole* (Quebec: Ministry of Agriculture, 1915), Bulletin No. 13, pp. 27, 28. *L'Action sociale* reduces the same argument to: "We can live without electricity; we cannot live without bread." And the editor spells out the argument more moderately as follows: we should rejoice at the progress and perfection achieved in our industrial equipment, but "Sachons, ...garder en cela une juste mesure, et n'allons pas, au milieu du bruit assourdissant des machines, oublier que la base de toute prospérité industrielle et commerciale, c'est l'agriculture. Pas de récoltes, pas d'argent; pas d'argent, pas de commerce." The "bad" years are the years when the farmers have no money to buy the products of industry which soon finds itself in crisis (*L'Action sociale*, June 3. 1911).

¹³ Abbé Georges Dugas, "De la vocation des canadiens à l'agriculture," *Rapport du congrès de la colonisation tenu à Montréal, les 22-24 novembre 1898*, p. 78. Abbé Dugas had formerly been a missionary in the Canadian Northwest and there seems, like Mgr Lafèche, to have acquired his passionate love for agriculture.

with productivity in industry. Father Adélarde Dugré tried to state this balance mathematically and explained that the industrial crisis of 1913 was caused by the fact that there were only 119 persons in rural areas for every 100 persons in the city, whereas, in 1901, there were still 165 in the countryside for every 100 in the city.¹⁴

Such economic reasonings as these are generously interspersed with biblical quotations and references to the Fathers of the Church, but they cannot in any meaningful way be said represent the economic thinking of the Church at this time. Her economic thinking was quite unsophisticated— she simply wanted to keep the French Canadians in the province and to help to provide the material base to make this a real possibility. At no time do the bishops themselves indulge in theoretical economic reasoning.

It is interesting to note that with the industrial crisis of 1913 and the outbreak of war the following year, the editors of *L'Action sociale*, Quebec's official Catholic daily, stepped up their campaign in favour of colonization and improved agriculture. Here the preoccupation is neither economic nor religious, it is racial. Economic and religious arguments are merely rallied to strengthen conclusions reached on "nationalist" reasoning.

Among these agriculturalist priests there is much rhetoric; they are used to rising to the occasion as special pleaders whenever required. But they themselves are seldom men of narrow vision. A one-time colonization missionary, Curé Corbeil, can on occasion give a lecture in Quebec City calling the desertion of the land a "lèse-nationalité," while at the same time he himself is busy building a pulp-and-papermill town at La Tuque, where the word "agriculture" scarcely enters his vocabulary.¹⁵ Curé Cimon of St. Alphonse (Bagotville) can, in 1900, plead the cause of agriculture and decry the evils of the manufacturing towns at a "fête agricole," held in the new pulp mill at Jonquière,¹⁶ and a few years later can equally revel in the success of the new all-French-Canadian mill at Chicoutimi, and be among the most ardent promoters of turning Ha Ha Bay into a major seaport to the benefit of his parish.¹⁷ The agricultural and colonization missionary who overshadowed and gave the example to all others, Curé Labelle,

¹⁴ Adélarde Dugré, S.J., *La désertion des campagnes; ses causes et ses remèdes* (Quebec: Ministry of Agriculture, 1916), Bulletin No. 19, p. 5. It is interesting to find the federal Board of Enquiry into the Cost of Living, in their report of 1915, talking almost the same language. They explain that the prices of food products have increased because of the decrease in the proportion of persons engaged in producing the food supply. Concentration in the cities "has increased the proportion of non-producing food consumers." And they recommend a policy of land settlement and better education in agriculture (*Report of the Board of Inquiry into the Cost of Living* (Ottawa: The King's Printer, 1915), 1, 12, 79).

¹⁵ *L'Action sociale*, March 18, 1909.

¹⁶ *Le Colon du Lac St-Jean*, September 27, 1900.

¹⁷ *Le Soleil*, November 29, 1903, which reproduces a letter of Curé Cimon to the directors of the Chicoutimi mill congratulating them on their great achievement.

while he took as the slogan on his coat of arms “Pater Meus Agricola” seemed to be as much at home in inviting French capitalists and industrialists to come to Canada, and promoting local railroads, manufacturing, mining, and tourism as in extolling the noble vocation of agriculture.

To what extent did the promotion of agriculture and colonization involve depreciating the newly developing manufacturing cities? The chief goal in all this campaign of the clergy was effectively to stop emigration to the manufacturing towns of the United States, and especially in those of New England. Hence these towns were often excoriated. In their joint pastoral letter of 1893, the bishops had them in mind when they talk of the crowds foolishly rushing headlong towards “les Babylones modernes” and their recommendation is to make agriculture sufficiently profitable to weaken the temptation to emigrate to the United States.¹⁸ Nowhere during this period can one find either the bishops or the clergy directly attacking French Canadian cities by name, although one suspects that Montreal was often at least implicitly included with those of New England. The clergy of the rural areas may rhetorically praise agriculture and the quiet peacefulness of the countryside at the expense of the noise and restless bustle of the city, but by the clergy of the cities there is certainly no general decrying of industrialization.¹⁹ Rather, the bishops set themselves the task of helping to promote the better economic and social organization of their respective cities, and we find the local Catholic press in such cities as Chicoutimi, Trois-Rivières, and Quebec City rejoicing at every local gain in industry, modernization of public utilities, and population. Unfortunately, no official Catholic newspaper was published in Montreal and we are thus handicapped in not being able to follow the day-to-day reactions of the local clergy to the city’s rapid developments. *L’Action sociale* and other outside Catholic papers from time to time expressed some reservations concerning the rapid growth of the metropolis, but these seem to stem primarily from a concern with racial survival. Montreal was considered too costly in health, energy, human life, and particularly in infant mortality – all of which were questions of life-and-death for the French Canadian race.²⁰

¹⁸ “Lettre Pastorale des Evêques établissant l’Oeuvre des Missionnaires Agricoles,” *Mandements, Lettres Pastorales, Circulaires* (Quebec, 1893), p. 97.

¹⁹ In the first plenary council of the Canadian bishops, which was held in Quebec in 1909, the preoccupation of the bishops was chiefly to promote and safeguard Catholic education; and the three major evils they selected to fight were abuse of alcohol, the growing practice of mixed marriages, and Catholic’s participation in “neutral” societies. Rapid industrialization and urbanization were neither excoriated nor praised (“L’esprit chrétien dans l’individu, dans la famille, et dans la société,” *Lettre pastorale des pères du premier concile plénier de Québec* (Québec: 1909), p. 33).

²⁰ For example, see *L’Action sociale*, October 1, 1909; December, 1911. In this concern they were not exaggerating. Montreal’s rate of infant mortality at this time was 242 per thousand second only to that of Calcutta, which was 252, the highest in the world. And, in 1909, Dr. Valin reported to the Royal Commission inquiring in to the causes of tuberculosis, “Montréal est la plus insalubre de toutes

The major goals sought by the clergy in descending order of their importance, seem to have been the following: (1) to keep the French Canadians from emigrating to the United States; (2) to keep them in the province of Quebec; and (3) only where possible, to keep them on the land. *L'Action sociale* clearly recognizes that the way to get French Canadians to return from the United States was to invite them to return not to farm, but to work in the more prosperous industries in Quebec.²¹

It usually seems to be among the more intellectual members of the clergy, among the journalists and the professors of classical colleges and seminaries, and not among the bishops and the curés, that we find men sufficiently removed from immediate involvement in economic life to endorse ardently the more unrealistic tenets of pure agriculturalism; though these people often live in the cities they seem to be the most removed of all from industrial reality. That some of these priests were fervent agriculturalists is evident from the fact that the economist Edouard Montpetit recounts that he personally was advised at this time by one of his professors at a classical college in Montreal that the best thing he could do in life was to become a farmer and settle on the good soil of French Canada.²² Errol Bouchette, too, claims that at the turn of the century there was in several of the colleges a current of thought that held that French Canadians were unfitted for business.²³ He also recalls an old professor whose common theme ran as follows,

Le commerce, l'industrie,... sont des occupations matérielles; nous, Canadiens français, sommes faits pour quelque chose de plus noble; soyons cultivateurs comme Cincinnatus, orateurs comme Cicéron et Bossuet; la charrue, la tribune, la chaire nous appellent; laissons le gain matériel aux natures plus grossières.²⁴

Brunet suggests that hundreds of other young men were probably counselled similarly to take up the plough, the tribune, or the pulpit.

At least prior to 1914, this seems highly unlikely, though we have not

nos villes à cause de son atmosphère pleine de poussière soulevée par les automobiles et les tramways; de la fumée vomie par les cheminées de ses nombreuses usines; à cause de *ses nombreuses habitations insalubres*; de sa population considérable d'immigrants qui se tassent dans des logements malpropres, infectés et humides et dans des quartiers insalubres par leur vétusté; enfin à cause du tassement des maisons et de l'étroitesse des rues." (Cited by Gustave Tremblay, "Le logement ouvrier," unpublished thesis at L'Ecole des Hautes Etudes, 1924, p. 13.) Valin also points out that, as late as 1922, 10 per cent of the deaths occurring in Montreal were due to tuberculosis.

²¹ For example, see *L'Action sociale*, April 21, 1908.

²² Edouard Montpetit, *Souvenirs* (Montréal: Editions de l'Arbre, 1944-1949), 1, 21.

²³ Errol Bouchette, "L'évolution économique dans la province de Québec," *Proceedings and Transactions of the Royal Society of Canada* VII, 2nd Series (May, 1901), Section 1, 120.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 122.

sufficient evidence to deny its truth categorically.²⁵ What is true is that the Catholic Action movement, founded in the classical colleges in 1903, did seem to adopt a certain agriculturalist bias, already found among some of the priest-professors and journalists who promoted it – among others, especially J. P. Tardivel, the editor of *La Vérité*. Because Catholic Action was a French Canadian nationalist movement to promote French Canadian interests, above all those of religion, language, and culture, the vital question of the promotion of agriculture and colonization found a place in its programme even before the serious problems arising out of rapid industrialization and urbanization, despite the fact that the majority of the students involved were attending classical colleges in the larger cities.²⁶ However, neither in the movement's congresses nor in its official publication, *Le Semeur*, do we find any recommendations that the students should turn their back on industry and city life and return to the farm. And its congress on education in 1913 strongly recommended that primary education be adapted to the milieu in which it was given, the rural schools being adapted to the needs of country folk and the city schools adapted to the needs of city folk.²⁷

Nor does this particular aspect of the agriculturalist theme appear anywhere in the Catholic press, although parents are asked not to push their children into the overloaded fields of the liberal professions and commerce, but rather to direct them into the more productive occupations of agriculture and industry.²⁸ Indeed the prevalent complaint seems to run in the opposite direction. The classical and commercial colleges are blamed for taking the children away from the farms and teaching them the ways of the city, thus causing them to lose their taste not only for agriculture but for manual work of any type. Besides, it was a common opinion, recurring again and again, that the proximity of an agricultural school to a classical college not only hurt the effectiveness of the former but did positive damage to the dignity of agriculture, a conviction about which these schools were endeavouring to instil in their pupils.²⁹ Finally, it should be noted that if such counsel was, in fact, occasionally given, it seems to have been quite ineffective. Montpetit became Quebec's first professional economist; Bouchette had long been his unofficial predecessor and one of the few at the turn of the century who clearly realized that "la survivance" to be complete had to include French Canadian control over big industry; Joseph Versailles, the first president of the Catholic Action movement, who can rightly be supposed to incarnate the spirit of the

²⁵ The author questioned a few graduates of classical colleges in Montreal and elsewhere on this matter; all denied categorically that any of their professors had tried to direct them towards agriculture.

²⁶ See *Premier congrès de la Jeunesse catholique et canadienne-française* (Montréal: Printed privately, 1903), p. 6.

²⁷ L'Association Catholique de la Jeunesse Canadienne-française, *Etude critique de notre système scolaire* (Montreal: Bureau de l'A.C.J.C., 1913), p. 160.

²⁸ For example, see *L'Action sociale*, December 22, 1913.

²⁹ For example, see Marc Perron, *Un grand éducateur agricole: Edouard A. Barnard, 1835-1898* (Quebec: Printed privately, 1955), p. 276; also pp. 259-60.

classical college élite of this period, became not a farmer, but a successful Montreal banker and the genuine successor to Bouchette, forever urging the French Canadians to fight systematically for their economic independence.³⁰ There is no record of college graduates dutifully turning back to the plough, although with the liberal professions overloaded and the channels into the business world practically blocked to him, it is not at all clear that the average college graduate contributed more as an insignificant lawyer or notary to the Gross National Product than did his fellow countryman, the successful farmer!

One suspects that the agriculturalist spirit was everywhere at this time, in the sense of a nostalgia for a French Canadian Catholic state where French Canadians would control their own religious, political, and economic history – the type of Laurentian state about which Mgr Laflèche dreamed, or the rosy French Canadian Kingdom of the Saguenay conjured up by the priest editors of *L'Oiseau Mouche*, the little paper of the petit séminaire de Chicoutimi. Interestingly enough, both dreams included industry – in the former figured the textile cities of New England, in the latter the mighty future industrial and commercial cities of the Canadian north! Doubtless, too, the appeal of claiming the Canadian North and peopling it with French Canadians free from the control of foreigners ever clung to the colonization and agriculturalist movement. But, by and large, the clergy, and particularly the bishops and the local curés, were down-to-earth realists, and, during the two decades of rapid economic development that preceded World War I, they not only adapted themselves to a quickly changing situation, but even eagerly taught their people how to benefit from it to the extent of their possibilities. Only a small group, composed chiefly of professors, orators, and journalists, who were usually less immediately involved in the day-to-day struggle with economic realities, could harbour actively and at times express publicly the full-blown philosophy of agriculturalism. It was to these that the people turned on special occasions, such as their national feast of St. Jean Baptiste, to have them conjure up in flowing rhetoric their long suppressed ambition of becoming one day a beacon to the people of the new world just as their “Mother” France had long been to the old – not merely a struggling minority held fast in the chains of economic slavery.

I conclude by adding that for an economist it is not without significance that the agriculturalist theme seems to “trough” and “peak” among clergy, politicians, and even economists with the troughs and peaks of the industrial cycle. For example, even Bishop Labrecque of Chicoutimi and Bishop Cloutier of Trois-Rivières, both ardent admirers and promoters of the new industrial progress that visited their dioceses during the economic spurt of 1896-1914, fall into the agriculturalist theme at either end of the industrial boom as heavy unemployment

³⁰ At the congress of 1921, Versailles was acclaimed as perfectly embodying the spirit of the movement (L'Association Catholique de la Jeunesse Canadienne-française, *Le problème industriel au Canada français* (Montréal: Secrétariat Général de l'A.C.J.C., 1922) p. 115.

again invades their dioceses. In 1893, we find Bishop Labrecque in a rare burst of eloquence addressing his people,

Encouragez les parents chrétiens, surtout les cultivateurs, à donner leurs enfants à l'agriculture et à la colonisation, leur rappelant qu'en agissant ainsi c'est les donner à la patrie, à la religion, à Dieu même.³¹

And in January 1914, when recession hits local industry, Bishop Cloutier again takes up the time-worn theme,

Chez tous les peuples, la terre est la plus solide assise de la prospérité publique, et chez nous, plus qu'ailleurs peut-être, c'est là, au sein de la classe agricole, que se trouve le plus puissant facteur de la richesse nationale, en même temps que le plus ferme soutien de nos précieuses traditions.³²

The sentiments of both bishops merely echo those of Premier Honoré Mercier, who a few decades earlier in a similar time of industrial recession restated the unquestioned proposition that agriculture was the true foundation of prosperity in Quebec.

L'agriculture est, surtout pour la province de Québec, la fondation première de la prospérité publique. On peut chercher à détourner le cours des fleuves et des rivières; on peut, par des travaux artificiels, réussir, pendant un certain temps, à produire des résultats temporairement satisfaisants; mais on ne peut empêcher une province d'être ce qu'elle est, tant sous le rapport du climat que sous celui des ressources agricoles. Or, la province de Québec a une population qui est nécessairement portée vers l'agriculture.³³

For the economist the suspicion remains that Albert Faucher and Maurice Lamontagne are correct – at least for periods of industrial recession – when they claim that in the past Quebecers, laymen and clergy alike, promoted agriculture not primarily because of some traditional philosophy, but “because there was nothing else to do.”³⁴

³¹ Mgr M. T. Labrecque, “Circulaire au clergé,” *Mandements, Lettres Pastorales, Circulaires* (Chicoutimi, May 4, 1893).

³² Mgr F. X. Cloutier, “Lettre pastorale sur l'action catholique,” *Mandements, Lettres Pastorales, Circulaires* (Trois-Rivières, January 1, 1914), p. 566.

³³ Speech cited by Alfred Pelland, “La colonisation dans la province de Québec,” *Revue Economique Canadienne*, II, (1912), 87.

³⁴ A. Faucher and M. Lamontagne, “History of Industrial Development,” *Essays on Contemporary Quebec*, ed. J. C. Falardeau (Québec: Presses Université Laval, 1953), p. 28.