

## MODERNIZATION THEORY AND A NEW LOOK AT THE HISTORY OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH IN QUEBEC

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In this paper, I wish to outline how the shift in paradigms in Quebec historiography has influenced interpretations of the Catholic Church in Quebec. In the 1970s and 1980s, historians began to examine Quebec as a modernizing society and came to the conclusion that it was never so unique, homogeneous or traditional as previously imagined. By adopting this paradigm, students of Quebec Catholicism have challenged traditional conceptions of the Church put forward by historians who were guided by traditional religious nationalism. I will show how this new paradigm has influenced one particular study, the third volume of the impressive series, *L'Histoire du catholicisme québécois*.<sup>1</sup> This volume, presented in two parts, was written by two French Quebecers, historian Jean Hamelin and sociologist Nicole Gagnon. By placing the activities and ideas of the Church in the context of Quebec as a modernizing society, they have come to the conclusion that the Church was never as powerful, monolithic, or anti-modern as both its supporters and critics suggested in the 1950s and 1960s.

In the second part of my paper, I will argue that while the movement to a paradigm based on modernization was an important advance, questions remain about the nature of modernity. In his important essay on Quebec historiography, Fernand Ouellet has argued that the application of modernization theory to Quebec history was achieved only after a professional class of lay university

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<sup>1</sup> The series so far includes (Lemieux 1989), (Sylvain et Voisine, 1991, Hamelin et Gagnon 1984, Hamelin 1984). Part two of volume three (Hamelin 1984) was written by Hamelin but includes significant contributions by Gagnon.

historians replaced clerical scholars who had been guided by a traditional religious nationalism (Ouellet 1985).

These historians, part of Quebec's "new middle class", have tended to see Quebec history in largely secular terms and have downplayed religion as a social force. While this has provided a valuable corrective to earlier studies which exaggerated the role and importance of Catholicism, there has been a temptation to suppress religion and other distinctive socio-cultural aspects of French Quebec altogether in order to stress the similarities between Quebec and other modernizing societies. In these histories, religion is not taken seriously as a social actor.

I argue that this tendency has arisen from the modernization theories which guide these historians' conceptualization of Quebec society and religion. What is needed are theories of modernization which take religion seriously. Recently Gregory Baum has suggested that David Martin's theories of how religion influences societies as they move into modernity offer some useful means of dealing with the role of the Church in Quebec (1991, 15-47). I believe these models are useful for two reasons. First, they can reveal which model of church and society was held by important groups or actors in Quebec history. Secondly, as students of Quebec society and religion, they allow us to become conscious of our own conceptualizations of both. While conceptualizations of the Quebec Church which are based on models abstracted from medieval Europe and modernizing Catholic societies are useful, I will argue that they need to be applied with caution in studies of Quebec society and Catholicism. The reasons for this caution reveal certain aspects which are unique about the modernization of Quebec. Martin's models of modernization help us to avoid reducing the history of Quebec to a single model which, in reaction to earlier explanations which exaggerated the role of religion, ignores it altogether.

### The Shift in Quebec Historiography

In their important two-volume history of contemporary Quebec, *L'Histoire du Québec contemporain*, Linteau *et al.* conclude that their work would have been impossible in the 1960s. This is because their approach was based on a whole new body of historical scholarship created since that time (Linteau, *et al.* 1989, 2:809-10).

The new scholarship was based on the application of sociological theories of modernization to the study of Quebec society. Gérard Bouchard argues that this represented a radical shift from the nationalist perspective which was founded on a conception of French Canada as "la nation humiliée et menacée". This perspective focused on how the French Canadian elite of politicians, liberal professionals, owners of small and medium sized businesses and the clergy, struggled to maintain their identity and solidarity in the face of the vulgar and materialist culture of America and the political machinations of English Canada.<sup>2</sup> The new paradigm was taken from sociological theories of modernization. The agenda of scholars who operate out of this paradigm has been to show that Quebec society has followed a pattern of development very much analogous to other Western societies. They argue that the nationalist historians tended to distort the image of Quebec by focusing on politics and ideology, both dominated by the traditional elite and by ignoring the social and economic questions. This imbalance arose out of an organic vision of Quebec society, an assumption which ignored important class differences and other divisions among French Canadians. Finally, the nationalist historians emphasized the differences between French Canada and other North American societies at the expense of their similarities. By focusing on what distinguished them from their neighbours, these scholars ignored important parallels and shared experiences (Bouchard 1990, 256-58).

### The New Paradigm and Modernization Theory

While there is a growing consensus among students of Quebec's history on the usefulness of modernization theory, this has not meant that they all share one vision of Quebec's development. For the most part this plurality of interpretations rests on the plurality of theories of modernization. As Kenneth McRoberts argues, no one has put forward a complete and satisfactory theory of development. While in disagreement over the

<sup>2</sup> Of course histories based on a nationalist paradigm are still being written in Quebec but the concept of the nation has been redefined in light of modernization theory. The nation is no longer defined in religious and cultural terms but in sociological terms, that is, the nation and nationalism as a response to, or symptom of, modernization.

basic features of modernity and its causes, sociologists agree that modern societies share more with each other than with traditional communities, even those out of which they emerged. McRoberts explains:

traditional society is more likely to be rural and agrarian than urban and industrial; status is more likely to be based on ascriptive ties than on achievement; values are more likely to be particularist and religious than universal and secular; social structures and social roles are more likely to be integrated with each other than differentiated. (McRoberts 1988, 12)

Historians in Quebec have agreed upon these basic assumptions and this has transformed the study of Quebec society.

The first important consequence was that, because modernization theory is a global theory, historians changed the object of their study from French Canada to Quebec as an integrated society, which included the anglophone minority, the immigrants, and the aboriginal peoples. This allowed historians to address socio-economic as well as religious, political and cultural issues (Ouellet 1985, 81-82). It also allowed them to place evaluations of the power and influence of French Canadian actors and institutions in the wider context of the power relations of the whole society. The second important consequence was the discovery of new sources of data and the creation of surprising interpretations.<sup>3</sup> Bouchard argues that recent studies show that French Canadian society had been influenced to a far greater extent and much earlier than previously imagined by the liberal enlightenment, capitalism, and the everyday realities of forging a society in North America (Bouchard 1990, 259-61). Of particular importance to students of

<sup>3</sup> To see how paradigms can determine what sources of data are considered important and how they are interpreted, one might consider Fernande Roy's *Progrès, harmonie, liberté: le libéralisme des milieux d'affaires francophones de Montréal au tournant du siècle* (1988). Because historians assumed that liberalism in Quebec was extinguished with the defeat of the more radical *rouge* element in the Liberal Party, they never thought to look for it in its most obvious home, the French Canadian business class. Roy explores the trade journals of this class and finds they are dominated by the themes of economic liberalism: progress, harmonious development, and liberty.

Catholicism are studies which suggest that liberalism had taken root in Quebec's economic elite by the turn of the century since this suggests a class of French Canadians which could act in relative autonomy from the Church and its official rejection of liberalism and capitalism. In fact, Linteau et al. suggest that liberalism and not traditional religious nationalism was the guiding ideology of Quebec's dominant classes in the inter-war period (Linteau et al. 1979, 1:695-710).

### Application of the new paradigm to the Catholic Church

The new paradigm has found its way into historical studies of the Catholic Church in Quebec and can be seen in the contribution of Jean Hamelin and Nicole Gagnon to the important series, *L'Histoire du catholicisme québécois*.<sup>4</sup> Hamelin and Gagnon argue that the Church never enjoyed the power or unanimity which both its critics and supporters assumed in the 1950s and 1960s. The Church had effective competitors for political power and social influence in the form of the French Canadian political elite and the market society. They argue that the Church was marked by significant divisions of ideology. Furthermore, they argue that the Church was not as anti-modern as was once assumed. Judged in the light of modernization theory, the Church's attitude towards and role in the development of Quebec society was complex and ambiguous.

### The power and influence of the Church

Hamelin and Gagnon show that, despite certain shared interests and cooperation, the Church and the French Canadian political elite battled constantly, particularly during the 1920s. Despite the Church's great prestige and power, the state did not always back

<sup>4</sup> The first important synthesis which reflected this new outlook was *Histoire de l'Église catholique au Québec, 1608-1970* by Nive Voisine, André Beaulieu, and Jean Hamelin. This book, an appendix to the report of the Commission d'étude sur les laïcs et l'Église, situates the Church in the broader context of French Quebec, a society which modernized under the domination of foreign political and economic elites. See also Ouellet (1985, 57-61) on the changes which marked historical studies of the Church after the Quiet Revolution.

down. They describe the adoption of la Loi de l'assistance publique as an important step in the evolution of the State's autonomy and power over the Church (Hamelin and Gagnon 1984, 1:252-58). The root of this competition, they argue, was Confederation itself, which had established a framework for social actors outside of the Church's power and influence. The democratic system of government and the free market provided structures which socialized the French Canadian political and economic elite into values and ideas foreign to Catholicism. Furthermore industrialization, urbanization, American popular culture, and mass communication created means of social participation and socialization outside of the Church's control, even among French Catholic workers. By the 1920s the elites were willing and able to challenge the Church directly in its own areas of expertise, that is, in social welfare services, health care, and education. In the 1940s, the Liberal regime of Adélard Godbout showed that with sufficient will, the government could act in defiance of the Church hierarchy. It liberalized the liquor laws, extended the vote to women, and made education obligatory despite the protests of the bishops (Hamelin 1984, 28-32).<sup>5</sup>

### Division within the Church

In a similar vein, Hamelin and Gagnon demonstrate that, despite outward shows of unanimity, there were great divisions within the Catholic community throughout the first four decades of the twentieth century. Even the hierarchy was divided on important issues. For example, while all Catholics agreed upon the importance of the laity in remaking French Canada a Catholic society, there were important differences on the structure, means and goals of the Catholic Action network. There were three sources of conflict: whether Catholic Action should be organized around the

<sup>5</sup> While it is clear that the Church enjoyed a privileged position in Quebec society under the Duplessis government, it would be a mistake to claim that this position arose out of its innate prestige and power. It is more likely that it was maintained out of its usefulness to the Union Nationale. The most obvious argument in favour of the Church's real weakness in Quebec society during the 1940s and 1950s was the incredible swiftness with which the Liberal government of Jean Lesage was able to take over the areas of education, health care, and social services in the 1960s.

national or the social question, whether it should be controlled locally or centrally, and whether the groups should be specialized, that is organized around a particular occupation or status, or more general to include any parishioner (Hamelin and Gagnon 1984, 1:419-32; Hamelin 1984, 2:71-82). Behind these questions were differences in pastoral strategies, ecclesiology, and ideological orientation which played themselves out within the shared horizon of Catholicism.

### The Church and modernity

Hamelin and Gagnon argue while the Church defined itself against modernity which it saw as too materialist, individualistic, and areligious (Hamelin and Gagnon 1984, 1:177-9), its relation to modernization was complex and ambiguous. They note that the Church's conservatism was not a dogmatic rejection of industrialization, urbanization, or democracy. If Laurier preached a pragmatic, rather than ideological liberalism, then the Church can be said to have practiced a pragmatic conservatism. Only small groups within the Church opposed capitalism and liberal democracy in absolute terms and they only found significant support during the Depression and other times of economic hardship. Overall the Church taught French Canadians to submit to the liberal democratic regime and to accept capitalism, even if it wished to reform the worst abuses of both (Hamelin and Gagnon 1:433-8).

The conservatism of the Church lay in its desire to subject economic development to politics and culture, and hence to religion. It accepted and encouraged those aspects of modernization which strengthened the religious and national identity of French Canadians. For example the clergy promoted industrialization and government investment in small cities and rural Quebec in order to keep French Canadians from moving to Montreal or to the United States. Furthermore, it was not loathe to adopt the means and structures of modern societies to its own ends. The Church organized Catholic labour unions, groups for youths, farmers, women, and workers, nationalist organizations, mass movements, and rallies, and took advantage of the modern communication network of press, film, radio and television.

Relying on William Ryan's 1966 study, *The Clergy and Economic Growth in Quebec*,<sup>6</sup> Hamelin and Gagnon conclude that the Church, in general and despite its anti-modern rhetoric, promoted the industrialization and modernization of Quebec society (1:289-91).

More consciously, some groups within the Church actively embraced modernity and introduced democratic themes into Quebec culture and society. For example, Père Georges-Henri Lévesque supported the deconfessionalization of the cooperative movement (Hamelin 1984, 91-96). His school of social sciences at Laval University created a whole generation of Quebec professionals dedicated to modernizing Quebec society. Hamelin argues that many of the currents which lead to the Quiet Revolution emerged out of the Catholic Action groups such as the *Jeunesse étudiante catholique* (Hamelin 1984, 132-33).

This is not to say that the Church did not present some real barriers to the modernization of French Canada. Out of reasons of self-interest, ideology, and a limited understanding of the nature of Quebec society, the Church opposed measures that would have created a more modern French Quebec, such as the introduction of female suffrage, education reform, the introduction of workers' political parties, and necessary democratic reform. However, Hamelin and Gagnon suggest that the Church's attitude towards and participation in the modernization of Quebec was more complex and ambiguous than earlier studies have suggested.

### Modernization theory and models of the Church

Central to the shift from nationalist history to modernization theory has been a reevaluation of the Church's social location. Under the paradigm defined by religious nationalism, it was easy to imagine the Church in Quebec as internally monolithic, socially dominant, and utterly opposed to modernization. The danger inherent in the new paradigm is the assumption that, because modern societies are secular, religion is not an important social force. Because Quebec historians look to the United States as a

<sup>6</sup> This is one of the earliest and most useful studies which applies theories of modernization to the Church in a conscious fashion.

model of modernization, this could translate into an underestimation of the importance of the Church prior to 1960. This would be an exaggeration of the valuable corrective which the application of modernization theory has provided. What is needed is a theory of modernization which takes the role of religion seriously. In his book, *A General Theory of Secularization*, David Martin provides a number of useful models for the relationship of the Catholic Church to modernizing societies. One can see how scholars of Quebec Catholicism have relied on similar models in their conceptions of the Church in the past. I wish to argue that these models have to be used in a nuanced way, but that they are important and useful since they guard against an application of the paradigm of modernization which would minimize the role and nature of the Church in Quebec unnecessarily.

### The "medieval" model

In European societies where Catholics formed a majority, the Catholicism of the counter-reformation and Baroque monarchies saw itself as the religion of the whole society. Consequently all the important social institutions were developed out of a Catholic ethos. Because the unity of faith was seen as one of the foundations of the common good, pluralism was rejected and religious minorities were suppressed (Martin 1978, 37-38). American sociologists who created the first studies of Quebec based on modernization theory often assumed that French Quebec represented such a traditional or pre-modern community (Linteau et al. 1989, 2:181-82.). As well, many Quebec historians and social critics in the 1950s assumed that the Church of Quebec had developed the same characteristics in terms of its unanimity and dominant social location. Of course, it is now recognized that French Quebec has been an urban, industrial society for some time. The model was useful in illuminating the decentralized and conservative character of rural French Quebec. It was also helpful in understanding the Church's self-definition and project because the social order of ancien regime France often acted as the guiding utopia for these activities. André-J. Bélanger has shown that Catholic conservatives dreamed of creating such a society but confined their activities to the social sphere. The political and economic elements of this conservative worldview, that is the restoration of the monarchy and medieval agrarian society, were inapplicable in Canada with its institutions of liberal democracy and

capitalism (Bélanger 1974, 15-21). French Catholicism against modernity

Given the domination of Quebec politics and economics by secular liberalism and the rejection of liberalism by the Church, some have suggested that the Church's reaction is best described by understanding it in terms of the post-revolutionary Church of France. According to Martin, after the Revolution, French society experienced a cultural schism in which Catholic conservatives rejected the new society, abandoned politics and economics and attempted to isolate the faithful in a Catholic ghetto (38-41). While this model is useful it is only partially applicable to Quebec. Because the economy was dominated by foreign capital, the Church in Quebec never found itself opposed by a liberal, French, Catholic, bourgeoisie.<sup>7</sup> While many Quebec Catholic intellectuals borrowed heavily from the conservative French religious rejection of modernity, this conservatism was interpreted and modified when it was applied to the North American context. For example, Quebec Catholics could never dream of a "restoration" of monarchical government, the way that French conservatives could in the person of Napoleon III. As Bélanger has argued, even when Quebec Catholics called for a "*chef*", their conception of this leader was cultural, social, and wholly apolitical (1974, 359-361). As Hamelin and Gagnon have suggested, the Church's conservatism was more pragmatic than ideological and absolute. During the Quiet Revolution, some Catholics adopted this intransigent rejection of modernity. For example, in the pages of *l'Action nationale* François-Albert Angers and the Jesuit Jean Genest relied on such a conceptualization of the Church in their rejection of the laicization of the education system proposed by the Lesage government and supported by the *Mouvement laïque de la langue française* (Genest 1962a, 1962b, 1962c, 1962d; Angers 1960, 1961). However, this intransigent attitude did not last and even the conservatives at la Ligue de l'Action nationale came to accept the interventionist state and to support the social democratic Parti Québécois.

<sup>7</sup> There were of course instances when the Church was opposed by such an elite, in particular, the anticlerical elements of *les patriotes* and *les rouges* of the nineteenth century. However members of these groups were from the liberal professions and not powerful owners of capital, as was the case in France.

### The Church-Nation model of Ireland and Poland

Some have argued that the Church in Quebec is best seen as an oppressed Church, the sole means of expression for a conquered nation.<sup>8</sup> This model is based on the experiences of Ireland and Poland, societies which were conquered by foreigners of another faith. Cut off from participation in political and economic decision-making, the elites of these societies expressed themselves within the structures of the Catholic Church so that church and nation became inseparable (Martin 1978 42, 107). The application of this model certainly helps to explain the loyalty of the workers, the middle class, and intellectuals to Catholicism before 1960 despite the great sacrifices demanded of them. However, French Canadians were not wholly excluded from defining their political and economic future. First, French Canadians have always had a limited but real participation in the political structures of their society. Representation in the federal government and a partially sovereign provincial government has allowed French Quebecers to define their society to some extent. As well the market society has allowed the development of French Canadian businesses, cooperatives, and credit unions which have allowed them a measure of participation in economic life. While Quebec stood in a relationship of dependence and exploitation to the British, English-Canadian and then American economic and political powers, it also benefited from participating in this complex network. In relationship to the Maritimes and western provinces, McRoberts argues, Quebec operated as a part of the central Canadian "core" rather than a periphery. This is not to dismiss the reality of the foreign domination of Quebec's economy nor the fact that French Canadians were the victims of a real cultural division of labour which restricted their participation in the economy unjustly (McRoberts 1988, 19-27). But because of the nature of Confederation and the market society, the application of the Polish/Irish model to Quebec does not tell the whole story. The conquest of Poland and Ireland was of a different nature than that of Quebec. Consequently the role of the Church in each society was also different. For example, in Quebec, industrialization meant the growth of a locally-controlled state apparatus and a French Canadian

<sup>8</sup> Baum argues that the Polish-Irish paradigm is useful in understanding the role of Catholicism in Quebec between 1900 and 1960 (1991, 30-35).

business class, creating a secular presence in Quebec society which could compete with the Church. In Poland and Ireland, development meant the elimination of such a presence.

### The Belgium exception

Baum suggests that the Martin's description of the Church in Belgium in the 1830s provides a useful model for understanding the Church in Quebec after 1960. Martin has argued that the creation of the independent Belgian state arose out of the liberals' struggle for autonomy against the claims of France and the Catholics' struggle against the domination of Protestant Holland. The coincidence of these two struggles the liberal constitution of Belgium recognized the rights and freedom of the Catholic Church. Struggles between liberals and Catholics never degenerated into a cultural schism because neither group could hope to win an unambiguous victory over the other. Furthermore, both groups recognized that the other belonged to the very foundation and nature of Belgian society (Baum 1991, 29; Martin 1978, 43, 126). Baum argues that the coincidence of the Quiet Revolution with the Second Vatican Council created an analogous situation in Quebec in the 1960s (30). However he notes that this model offers us "a helpful hint" (30); it is not meant to be fully explanatory.

### The Catholic minority model

The wider context of Confederation may lead some to apply models taken from societies where Catholics form a minority. Martin argues that in such societies, two situations arose. Either Catholics participated in a wider religious pluralism such as in the United States, or they formed a territorially concentrated, distinct group such as in Germany. In both situations, the Church has often acted as a progressive force and insisted on the separation of Church and State (Martin 1978, 28-35, 49-54). Obviously the application of this model to the Quebec Church is quite limited since French Catholics in Quebec understood themselves *primarily* as a majority population and only secondarily as a minority (Baum 1991, 29-30). But under special circumstances, this model has been used fruitfully. For example, Roberto Perin (1990) has shown that this is precisely how the Vatican viewed the Quebec Church at the turn of the century. Such a perspective would also explain the long history of the episcopacy's support of Confederation in general and

Cardinal Villeneuve's enthusiasm for the war effort during the Second World War.

### The conceptualization of the Quebec Church in modernization theories: complexity, ambiguity and uniqueness

The application of each of these models has shed some light on the nature and role of Catholicism in French Quebec. However Quebec society and Catholicism remain elusive subjects. French Quebec before 1960 was an "in-between" society, not fully engaged in industrialization, but partially so, not fully a colony, but partially so, not fully opposed to modernity, but partially so. This fact has three important implications for histories of Quebec society and Quebec Church history. The first is that it may be useful for students of Quebec Catholicism who wish to study the Church in the context of a modernizing society to search out similar "semi-peripheral" societies which were distinguished both by their culture and religion. This will mean that comparisons to France or Poland may need to be supplemented with studies of Scotland, Wales, or Brittany. Secondly, the nature of Quebec society and of Quebec Catholicism demands that historians develop models of society and the Church which are open to complexity and ambiguity. As Léon Dion has argued, even the allegedly monolithic traditional Catholicism served different functions among French Quebecers (1975, 44-45). French Quebecers participated in a complex series of relationships both internally and externally. The Church's role and importance has to be interpreted in light of each of these relationships and not just any one of them. The third is that historians and social scientists must consider the possibility that, just as we have re-evaluated the exaggeration of the dominant role of Catholicism in pre-1960 Quebec society, the assumption that religion has become irrelevant in post-1960 Quebec has to be rethought.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>9</sup> For example François-Pierre Gingras and Neil Nevitte have argued that religious values were still operative in people's political choices on the question of Quebec independence in 1976. See Nevitte 1978; Gingras and Nevitte 1983; Nevitte and Gingras 1984.

The application of a paradigm based on modernization need not diminish the uniqueness of Quebec society. Whatever its similarities to the modernizing societies of North America, it is the only society which could boast a Catholic majority which distinguished it from its internal economic elite. It was also the only society which operated as a Catholic minority within a larger political federation. If David Martin is correct in his contention that religion plays a meaningful role in the way societies move into modernity, then the Quebec experience was unique on this continent. The application of Martin's models protects against an easy reduction of the complexity and uniqueness of Quebec society to a single model. In fact, some historians and social scientists have argued that it is the very existence of the complexities and ambiguities discussed here which make up this uniqueness. The shift from the nationalist paradigm to modernization theory in Quebec historiography represents an important step in allowing students of Quebec society and Catholicism to address this complexity and ambiguity. If applied with some caution, it allows us to reevaluate earlier exaggerations of the Church's position and power without negating its importance unnecessarily.

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## SOMMAIRE

### LA THÉORIE DE LA MODERNISATION: NOUVELLE APPROCHE DE L'HISTOIRE DE L'ÉGLISE CATHOLIQUE AU QUÉBEC

Dans les années 70 et 80, les historiens québécois ont commencé à appliquer les modèles sociologiques de la *modernisation* afin d'expliquer comment le Québec était devenu une société moderne, urbaine et industrielle. Cette nouvelle approche les a conduits à une importante réévaluation du rôle de l'Église catholique ainsi que de celui de la religion dans le façonnement de la société québécoise. Ils ont cessé de considérer l'Église comme formant l'institution sociale dominante au Québec et ont commencé à regarder le nationalisme religieux comme constituant un point de vue idéologique se trouvant en concurrence avec d'autres. Paul-André Linteau et les autres auteurs qui ont rédigé une importante Histoire du Québec contemporain soutiennent même que c'est le libéralisme et non le nationalisme religieux qui constituait l'idéologie dominante du Québec français de l'entre-deux guerres mondiales. J'utilise le troisième tome de la Collection *L'Histoire du catholicisme québécois*, de Jean Hamelin et Nicole Gagnon, pour montrer de quelle façon le paradigme de la théorie de la modernisation a conduit les historiens à conclure que l'Église n'a jamais été aussi puissante, monolithique et anti-moderniste que l'ont laissé entendre, dans les années 50 et 60, tant ses partisans que ses détracteurs.

Tandis que la théorie de la modernisation apportait une contribution précieuse à notre manière de concevoir les rapports

existant entre l'Église et les autres élites de la société québécoise, la tentation est apparue de ne tenir aucun compte du rôle que l'Église a joué dans l'histoire du Québec. Cette tentation découle des hypothèses mêmes contenues dans la théorie de la modernisation selon lesquelles la sécularisation était inévitable, et pour lesquelles la religion n'a eu qu'un rôle secondaire à jouer dans les changements sociaux. Étant donnée l'importance de l'Église dans le développement de la société québécoise, les historiens devraient s'inspirer d'une théorie de la modernisation qui tienne compte de façon sérieuse de la religion. Le sociologue britannique David Martin a présenté une théorie de la modernisation qui montre comment la religion a influé sur la façon dont les sociétés ont évolué en direction de la modernité. Il a proposé plusieurs modèles que les sociétés catholiques ont pu adopter lorsque l'Église a fait face à une élite laïque et modernisatrice. Comme ce fut le cas en France et en Italie, le mouvement vers la modernité a souvent provoqué un schisme culturel entre l'Église et l'élite laïque. Toutefois, lorsqu'une nation est tombée sous domination étrangère (en Pologne ou en Irlande, par exemple), l'Église a remplacé l'État comme structure d'encadrement social de cette nation. Lorsque l'Église et l'élite modernisatrice en sont arrivées à se respecter l'une et l'autre, comme en Belgique, elles ont pu former une coalition au sein de laquelle chacun des deux groupes a considéré l'autre comme un des fondements de la société nouvelle. Enfin, quand l'Église s'est trouvée dans une position minoritaire, comme en Allemagne, elle a eu tendance à se transformer en une force progressiste. Chacune de ces conceptions a été appliquée par les historiens et les spécialistes des sciences humaines aux rapports existant entre l'Église catholique et les autres élites du Québec. Chacune possède une valeur explicative mais aucune ne s'avère entièrement satisfaisante. Mon hypothèse est que le caractère unique de la société et du catholicisme québécois découle de la complexité et de l'ambiguïté des rapports qui existent entre l'Église et les autres élites de la société québécoise.