A distinctive North American identity evolved in a particular institutional framework in which the seigneurial system encompassed rural agriculture, the economic institutions expressed urban life, the church dominated intellectual and spiritual life and the royal administration supervised over all aspects of colonial development. In this *encadrement*, a new social type - the *Canadien* - gradually emerged that was neither an exact replica of the metropolitan French nor yet entirely a North American type devoid of European values and characteristics. It is useful, therefore, to examine each of these institutional elements as transplanted to the 'New World' and adapted to a new environment and period.

**Seigneurial System:**

The granting of land to the seigneurs initiated the system of land relations in the colony that was to hold sway over a period of more than two hundred years and profoundly influence the evolution of the colony. It is important, therefore, to look into the origins of this system, its nature and its role in the shaping of the embryonic colony. In its

---

1. The introduction of seigneurial system in Canada undoubtedly led to far-reaching consequences, especially for the habitants' social and economic perspectives. According to J.M. Bumsted: "If career soldiering and seigneurial system gave a more European cast to the Canadian elite, that same seigneurial system also meant that the Canadian habitant remained more a traditional peasant than did his colonial English counterpart. He was less market oriented, less interested in land speculation and relatively inelastic in his demand for consumer goods. Despite his extensive adaptation of Indian customs - in his attitudes towards gender roles and in his vulgar speech, for example - the Canadian retained European models and was quite conservative. The elite in Canada consciously aped the culture of the mother country, and the habitant adapted French folk tradition to the New World. But the habitant was no frontier capitalist; instead, he was rather more a backwoods French peasant." The Cultural Landscape of Early Canada by J.M. Bumsted in *Strangers Within the Realm: Cultural Margins of the First British Empire*, ed., Bernard Bailyn, Philip D Morgan, University of North Carolina Press, 1991, p. 370.

2. For an insightful and detailed analysis of how the seigneurial system developed in Canada, how it differed from its counterpart in France and what were the effects it had on the society and economy of New France, see R. Colebrook Harris, The Seigneurial System in Early Canada, A Geographical Study, McGill 1984. Harris contest the widely held belief that the seigneurial system as it developed in early Canada had a deep impact on the social and economic life of the colony. Ibid.
origins, the seigneurial system goes back to medieval France, where it was the most important institution through which feudalism governed the multiple aspects of a primarily agrarian society. In that milieu, the system was not simply a mode of distribution of land, but it involved the regulation of the entire socio-economic structure of the society. It was essentially a hierarchical organization of society in which the bulk of the land was under the ownership of the landed magnates, who distributed smaller tracts of land to the lesser members of the nobility. These later in turn conceded it to still smaller holders and thus the process continued until the formation of a multileveled hierarchy in land-ownership was created. It involved an obligation of loyalty and military service to ones overlord, in addition to the payment of rents and various other forms of dues. The king was placed at the top of this pyramid, and all the feudal chiefs in the domain owed military service and loyalty to him. The peasant was at the bottom of this hierarchy. He was expected to pay an annual rent, known as the cens, to his immediate overlord, to pay him a lods and ventes on the sale and purchase of any property, to take the grain he produced to the seigneur’s grist-mill to be turned into flour and to render corvée, or forced labour, to him under some conditions. In exchange for all this, the seigneur, or the immediate overlord in a given context, had the responsibility to provide peace and security to the peasantry. Thus, the seigneurial system as it had prevailed in France was in a way a localized system of autonomous governance based on the ownership of land. It is not the contention here that this system remained unchanged over a period of centuries or that it was ever close to the ideal presented here. On the contrary, the system had changed in many ways and one of these changes was reflected in the growing absence of military service as an obligation on the part of the

seigneurial class by the seventeenth century, due mainly to the rise of a relatively more powerful monarchy having a large enough standing army at its disposal.

When this seigneurial system was transplanted in New France, its essential framework was more or less retained in theory. One could argue that the endeavour was the creation of the French system of three estates with nobility at the top of the social pyramid. The censitaire was required to pay foi et hommage, lods and ventes to his seigneur. In theory, even the judicial rights of the seigneur were recognized, and he was allowed to go to the extent of exercising what was described as 'haute justice' involving such serious punishments as execution for the more serious offences. Even corvée was recognized as a legitimate right of the seigneur.

Nevertheless, the mere recognition of these rights in theory should not be assumed to mean that the seigneurial system, as it prevailed in medieval France, came to flourish in the Laurentian valley. As pointed out earlier, by the seventeenth century, the system had undergone substantial mutations within France itself. But quite apart from that, fois et hommage did not constitute a substantial tax of any sort, while the legal powers granted to the seigneurs were more a burden to them than an instrument of tyrannical overlordship, for the resources required to constitute the seigneurial courts were simply not available. In any case, it was the Company of One Hundred Associates that retained the initiative in this matter up to the end of the company rule. As far as corvée or statute labour is concerned, it needs to be pointed out that the seigneur had little or no means to enforce it upon the habitants. In any case, corvée in the colony was due to the state and

---

4 William Bennett Munro, *The Seigneurs of Old Canada*, Kessinger Publishing, 2004. Writing about the transformation the old feudal had undergone in France, Munro says: "The obligation of military service, when no longer needed, was replaced by dues and payments. The modern cash nexus replaced the old personal bond between vassal and lord. The feudal system became the seigneurial system. The lord became the seigneur; the vassal became the censitaire or the peasant cultivator whose chief function was to yield revenue for his seigneur's purse. These were great changes which sapped the spirit of ancient institution."
Ibid. p. 7.
was supervised by the captains of the militia. At this stage, the society was still an emerging one, and there was nothing like an organized coercive mechanism at the disposal of the seigneur. The need to survive in an alien atmosphere replete with its dangers could not allow the distinction between the seigneur and the censitaire to go very far. It is important to remember that, as if to emphasize the fact of his non-military status, the seigneur would not be made the captain of the militia, when it was constituted in the later period. Rather, this position, which was of considerable status, was reserved for the habitants. Thus the defence of the community, which had been the mainstay of feudal power in medieval Europe, was not left to the seigneur.

Perhaps, the most important function of the system at this stage was to provide a rough model for a system of land tenure and social hierarchy, without which the emerging colony could not have been constituted. Thus, the transplantation of the system was simply aimed at producing the colony in the broad image of the mother country, where social organization was still hierarchical though not feudal in the characteristically medieval–European sense of the word. In any case, the intentions could not succeed in reproducing the same system in the colony, as shall be seen later.

---

5 It is argued by some scholars that the transformation the seigneurial system went through revived some of the strengths of the old feudal system in France that were particularly suited for survival in Canada. According to W.B. Munro: “In the history of French Canada we find the seigneurial system forced back towards its old feudal plane. We see it gain in vitality; we see the old personal bond between the lord and vassal restored to some of its pristine strength; we see the military aspects of the system revived, and its more sordid phases thrust aside. It turned New France into a huge armed cap; it gave the colony a closely knit military organization; and, in a day when Canada needed every ounce of her strength, to ward off encircling enemies both white and red, it did for her what no other system could be expected to do.” William Bennett Munro, The Seigneurs of Old Canada, Kessinger Publishing, 2004, p. 7.

6 As we have seen earlier, the resemblance to the system prevailing in France was only superficial. More than anything else the system was modified to create a balanced economic system in Canada. According to Jean Claude Marsan, “This system, administered since 1663 under the common law of Paris, had inherited the rights, the vocabulary and a little of the spirit of feudalism, but resembled the latter only outwardly. In New France, it was essentially an economic system for the development of land through which the government maintained a vigilant eye on the rights and duties of all parties concerned.” Jean Claude Marsan, Montreal in Evolution, McGill, 1990, p. 22.
It is plain that the seigneurial system as introduced in New France could not be a replica of the original system in the mother country. The most important reason working against such a possibility was, of course, the abundance of land in the colony. In contrast with France, a settler in the colony could cultivate as much land as he might wish to, after receiving a concession from a seigneur, the only constraint— and a very important one at that— being the clearing and settling of the land. This ready availability of land would mean that no seigneur was in a position to push his censitaires too far. Apart from this, the small population of the colony would generally be a factor working against too rigid a class structure, as that might make it difficult to maintain the harmony and cohesion that would be necessary for the very existence of the community in what is so graphically described as the North-American wilderness. While there can be no denying that the early colonists came from various parts of France, the very fact that they were all going to live together in a far away land would in many ways tend to have a certain homogenizing influence reflected partly in the condescending term ‘Canadianization’. In any case, there is no evidence to show the existence of a proletariat in the nascent colony, even though many of these early settlers belonged to that class in the mother country. The success of an experiment starting with the seigneury granted to Giffard convinced the Company of One Hundred Associates of the efficacy of this particular method of settling

---

7 Richard Colebrook Harris has done an incisive analysis of the reasons behind the transformation of the seigneurial system in Canada. According to Harris: "Some laws were altered, but the background of the decisive changes has been seen in a Canadian way of life which was significantly different from the French. In France, there was an economic gulf between the seigneurs and censitaires. In Canada, many seigneurs were no better off than their censitaires, and nowhere were those extremes of wealth that characterized an effete feudalism in its waning years. In France, the seigneurial system was woven into a rigid class hierarchy. There was little economic basis for class in Canada, and although some seigneurs were addressed as sieurs and almost all were entitled to some privileges, the Old World distinctions were blunted when seigneurs and censitaires worked side by side on the land. A submissive French peasantry was replaced in Canada by independent, self-reliant habitants who, with an intendant's support, would not accept many of the more burdensome charges of seventeenth century French feudalism. These points have been made many times and there is no reason to dispute any of them." Richard Colebrook Harris, *The Seigneurial System in Early Canada: A Geographical Study*, McGill, 1984, p. 5.
the colony. Consequently, between 1633 and 1663, the company granted land in New France to around seventy settlers, while it remained the seigneur of the whole colony. There was no rent to be paid to the company, and the seigneur was obliged to settle his land, failing which he stood to forfeit his title to it. Moreover, the seigneur was obliged to grant land to the censitaire who was expected to do the actual task of settling the land.

By 1663, there were 69 seigneurs who had received their titles directly from One Hundred Associates. The area covered by these seigneuries extended to around thirteen million arpents. The clergy represented an important seigneurial class, though it was an institutional ownership in their case. Among them, the Jesuits, the Sulpicians, the Hospital Nuns, the Ursulines, the Fabrique or parish Council of Quebec and the Indians of Sillery 'reservation' owned close to 11 percent of the total seigneurial land. The rest of the land was in the hands of the remaining 62 seigneurs.

The individual seigneurs were predominantly from the established aristocracy in France, occupying around 85 percent of the total seigneurial land. What is more important, however, to note is that this aristocracy was not exclusively a landed one; the 'bourgeois' class represented 15 percent of the total share of the land under this category. It is equally important to note that there was no uniformity in the size of each concession. The widow of Jean de Lauson alone held close to 47 percent of the total seigneurial land, while another 46 percent was held by fourteen other seigneurs. Thus, only about 7 percent of all land granted to the individual seigneurs was left to the remaining holders.

Very few of the seigneurs, however, placed much value on the vast tracts of land they had been conceded by the company with a view to getting it settled. Preoccupied as they were with other more profitable activities, be it trade or the high administration, they had little
patience, even less inclination, to take their seigneurial duties too literally. A majority of them had not so much as deigned to even visit their concessions. Above all, the settling of these lands with censitaires was hard work. It required massive investments on the part of the holders, and the profits were not expected to be very high in proportion to those investments. Given this state of affairs, the land that had actually been conceded to the settlers stood at slightly above 110,000 arpents, which was less than one percent of the total land conceded to the seigneurs. It is obvious that, at this stage, the land tenure system was in the process of emerging, and only the broad contours thereof were visible. The clergy, especially the Jesuits, were the most efficient seigneurs in terms of the development of the land held by them. Thus, one third of the total land granted to the Jesuits had already been settled by the end of our period. More importantly, most of these lands were near the three settlements of Quebec, Trois Rivières and Montreal, and they occupied close to a quarter of the total river frontage granted. One of the reasons behind the quick settlement of the seigneuries held by the Jesuits was that the missionaries required the income from these lands much more than other seigneurs.

Distinctive Patterns of Settlement:

Land settlement in New France came to acquire, from the very outset, some distinctive features of its own, setting it apart from the mother country. The censitaires were granted concessions by the seigneurs on the conditions earlier mentioned, and these concessions could vary considerably in size. The average concession extended over a hundred to two hundred arpents, which was considerable amount of land. What is interesting about the settlement, though, is the fact that unlike in France, farms were conceded in a long line along the St. Lawrence River and the usual circular pattern prevalent in France was
abandoned. Several explanations may be given for this unusual method of agricultural settlement. Perhaps, the most important of these was the sheer difficulty of transportation and communication through any means other than the river, which provided the only available highway, so to say, to the different parts of the colony, and also to France. With the total absence of roads of any sort, it was natural that the habitants were anxious to retain their access to the river. Other reasons may be cited for this particular pattern of land settlement. It is at times argued that the habitants' insistence on settling along the river emanated from their desire to maintain their freedom from seigneurial and parish control, which would be expected to be more strict in a closely settled village community. Whatever may be the reasons that led to this kind of settlement, it had a number of important consequences for the emerging colony. If farms were to be granted along the river, then they could only be parallelograms, with a small frontage on the river. The typical farm had ten times more depth than width along the river. This system would ensure in future a further imbalance in the two dimensions, as the process of fragmentation of land would start intensifying because of the custom law of inheritance rights.

The parallelogram shape that the farms adopted from the very beginning is a curious example of the environmental influence on the habitants. In France, agricultural farms were usually rectangular. But such a shape would not have been in the best interests of the habitants in the seventeenth century Canada. If once it is conceded that farms had to be situated along the riverfront, rectangular farms could not but be ruled out in the very nature of things, for they would soon exhaust the riverfront. Apart from the fact that they afforded river frontage to larger number of censitaires, parallelogram farms had other
advantages in the thinly-populated Laurentian valley. Not only did they allow the habitant to live in close company with his neighbours on each side—which would not have been possible in the event of a much larger width of rectangular farms—but they also made the task of distribution of land much easier. Diversity of land types—hay land near river, heavy soils for cereals, stony land for pastures and woodlots at the rear of the parallelogram—could best be utilised under this system.

As mentioned earlier, the total land conceded to the censitaires at the end of our period was less than one percent of the total land granted under the seigneurial regime. Furthermore, this land was not uniformly divided between Quebec, Trois Rivières and Montreal. Settlement of land was most advanced at Quebec and its vicinity, which also represented, as we mentioned earlier, two-thirds of the total population of the colony. Approximately 90 percent of the total land, extending over slightly more than 100,000 arpents, settled thus far was in this region. With a total of around 500 farms, the average size of the farm comes close to 200 arpents. Trois Rivières and Montreal accounted for slightly less than 10 percent of the total land conceded by the seigneurs.

It should not be assumed that all the land conceded and settled in the sense of being occupied by the beneficiaries was actually under cultivation. Clearing of the land in order to bring it under the plough was an agonizingly slow process. Working full time, a man could clear anywhere between one and a half to two acres of land per year. Owing to the constraints imposed by the small labour force at the disposal of the colony, only a part of the land conceded to each censitaire was actually cleared. Thus, there was a huge abundance of cultivable land in the vicinity of Quebec and other settlements. In the
subsequent period, this land would gradually be cleared, until adequate portion of it was brought under the plough to produce enough grain for the colonists.

It is to be noted that land was far from being the only resource at the disposal of the habitants, who could depend upon the St. Lawrence to provide them with adequate supplies of fish. From the very outset, therefore, fish constituted a basic element of the habitant’s diet, even though in the early period, large-scale fishing was usually not practised in the colony, due probably to a shortage of manpower. The habitants also had the freedom to hunt, and the Laurentian valley was full of wild animals and birds. Since the colony was in an embryonic stage, and there was nothing like an elaborate administrative and legal paraphernalia in place to restrict the exploitation of forest resources, etc. as in the mother country, the habitant could depend upon a regular supply of game to supplement his diet.

There can be no denying that the early colonists had an abundance of natural resources, which, if exploited well, could easily sustain a large population in the colony. It must be remembered, however, that the colony, at this time, was in the initial stages of its development and most of the habitants were first-generation migrants from France for whom adaptation to the new environment would not have been easy.

Colonial Expansion:

Between 1650 and 1661, New France was in any case in the throes of a crisis that had put an end to all expansionist activities; in fact, there was an impending danger of the total collapse of the system built over a long period. This was the result of the Iroquois warfare against the colonists. Whereas these redoubtable warriors had been antagonized by the French pioneers and their Indian allies from the very beginning of the seventeenth
century and had continued their hostile activities in the following decades, it was around the middle of the century that they virtually declared a war against the allies of the French. By 1650, they had dispersed the Hurons, and subsequently they raided the Laurentian settlements killing and capturing the colonists at will. Between 1658 and 1661, the Iroquois almost brought a halt to agriculture and trade. Hardest hit was Montreal, where the population was still too small to mount any effective defence against the marauding Iroquois raids. Conditions at Trois Rivières were not much better than those at Montreal. In both the places, any outdoor activities could be carried out only in a large group, as the Iroquois raiders were always lurking in the background. In 1661 alone, no less than seventy people were killed in these raids. On the eve of the royal takeover of the colony, therefore, New France was in dire straits and needed immediate help from France to guard it against the native attacks. From the very outset, therefore, the colonists became acquainted with warfare and a military ethos resulted. The Iroquois, on their part, had no intention of destroying the colony, but only wished to participate in the French trade which would enhance their hegemonic position vis a vis the Dutch and later the English to the south.

It was as a result of this increased settlement of land that two new bases, Trois Rivières and Montreal, soon came up. As cultivable land in the close vicinity of Quebec was limited, settlement started spreading to other nearby locations. In the case of Trois Rivières, which had been founded by Champlain to accommodate the growing population, it was due as much to the fact that it was a very well located place and that the Jesuits, who had considerable resources and determination at their disposal, were the seigneurs of the area. Situated at the confluence of the St. Lawrence with the St. Maurice,
the post was admirably suited to serve as a meeting place for fur traders from the western region. Because of its fortifications, it was also able to serve as an advance post for Quebec while at the same time affording shelter to the Hurons and other native allies of the French against the Iroquois menace from the south. The Iroquois dominated the region south of the St. Lawrence around the Richelieu, and were thus favourably placed to mount attacks on the French and their Indian allies by sailing up the river. There was another advantage to the post. Owing to its more southerly location in relation to Quebec, it had a less inhospitable climate.

Montreal or Ville Marie was established by the Jesuits in 1642 primarily with the aim of converting the 'savages' to Christianity. For the purpose of founding the settlement, a society calling itself Les Messieurs et Dames de la Société de Notre-Dame pour la Conversion des Sauvages de la Nouvelle France was brought into existence. However, once established, the settlement proved to be a successful trading post for furs from the interiors of the continent. At this stage, it remained a small settlement of less than hundred people in all. Moreover, it was without fortification, and was thus most vulnerable to the Iroquois attacks. Despite these initial limitations, Montreal was to emerge in the later days as the most important settlement after Quebec.

---

8 Champlain had a palisade built at Trois Rivières, which naturally enhanced the security of the post. *Relation des Jésuites*, 1634, 228.
9 That the relatively favorable climate of Trois Rivières was a factor behind the establishment of the post is confirmed by Champlain, who is reported to have said, '... the temperature of the air is much more moderate, the land more fertile, the fishing and hunting more abundant than at Quebec'. Champlain to Richelieu, *Works of Champlain*, H.P. Biggar, ed. VI, P. 378.
10 As in the case of Trois Rivieres, the site at which Montreal was located was particularly suited for this purpose. According to Jean-Claude Marsan has put it: "From a geographical as well as an economic viewpoint, the location of Montreal Island is exceptional: about 1600 kilometers inland, at the confluence of three important waterways." Jean-Claude Marsan, *Montreal in Evolution*, McGill, 1990, p. 5.
Even though the settlement in the colony in the 1630s was nowhere near the scale it should have been, if the Company of One Hundred Associates had stuck to its charter in this regard, the very fact that new people were coming to settle in the colony and were clearing the land for this purpose was bound to provide New France with a new lease of life.

By this time, the habitants had already started thinking in terms of community action aimed at self-survival. The Company of New France was on the brink of bankruptcy, and there was very little that it could do for the development of the colony. Taking cognizance of this situation, the habitants coalesced into forming a company named Communauté des Habitants to take control of the profitable fur trade. The Hundred Associates agreed to cede their right to fur trade in the colony to this new entity for an annual payment of 1,000 beaver furs. Along with this, the Communauté also acquired the right to govern the colony, including the distribution of the seigneurial land. In this way, the habitants secured a high level of autonomy to develop the colony along the lines they preferred.

The Foundation and Evolution of Catholic Church in Canada:

We have not discussed so far the evolution of the church in New France in order to deal with it in a more comprehensive manner here. To reflect on the early history of the church in New France is to be confronted with questions pertaining to its nature, organization, and its role in shaping the colony, the nature and scope of its authority in spiritual and temporal domains, and its interface with the rest of the evolving society.

The Advent of Missionary Church: Native Conversions:

\[13\] Relations des Jésuites, 1643, p. 268.
It is important to remember that the church as it developed in New France was the Catholic Church. Even though the French colonial enterprise in North America had in the beginning involved Protestants, who were openly antagonistic to Catholic missionaries, there is no evidence of the presence of any Protestant Church in the colony during the period under review. This was because the Huguenots, though influential in trade and commerce, could practice their faith only with certain constraints. Thus, during the early contact period, when the Huguenots more or less dominated all the commercial enterprises in the New France, they were prohibited from organising a colonial church.

There are two distinct, though not unrelated, ways in which the Catholic Church migrated to New France. The first was, of course, the transplantation of the institution from the mother country due to the presence of its members. The second, and arguably the more important, rationale for the advent of the church in New France was the conversion to Christianity of the natives described condescendingly by the Frenchmen as ‘heathens’ and ‘savages’. The advent of the missionary church in the colony has a long history, in the sense that any pious Christian in the sixteenth century would have considered it his duty to spread his faith wherever possible, though without making conversion as the raison d’être of his enterprise. It is in this light that Cartier’s comments where he talks about the prospects of converting the natives to Christianity should be seen. It was perhaps the most appropriate thing from the point of view of a rapidly expanding Christian Europe to believe that the natives were devoid of religion and civilization, since the native forms of what we describe as religion and civilization were so very different from the European culture and Christianity. Additionally, the conversion of the natives to Christianity could always be considered as the justification for the encroachment into the
'new world'. In fact, some of the early explorers and discoverers went to the extent of arguing that the spread of Christianity in the newly discovered lands was a sacred commission bestowed upon them by the grace of God.

Even though Cartier, during his three famous expeditions, had been accompanied by chaplains, fathers Pierre Biard and Ennemond Massé were the first missionaries to have settled in New France and to have made a serious effort to convert the natives to Christianity. They both belonged to the Society of Jesus, constituted in the preceding century by the Spanish monk, Loyola, to counter the effects of Protestantism and to bring about a revival of Catholicism in Europe as well as other parts of the world. They were organized along military lines, and were accountable only to their Superior General, who, in turn, derived his authority directly from the Pope. In this manner, therefore, the Jesuits constituted the elite guard of Catholic revivalism in Europe. For all their hard work, however, Biard and Massé were not very successful in the mission of converting the natives to Christianity, though they made great strides in learning the Indian languages, and baptized some native children at Port Royal. Jessée, a secular priest, was more successful in this regard. One of the reasons behind the comparative lack of success was the antagonism of the Huguenot merchants, who were then in charge of Acadia and were bitterly opposed to the Jesuits.

Be that as it may, the need for some missionaries was felt at the post of Quebec from the very beginning. According to some sources, Champlain was personally anxious to spread the gospel among the natives and, therefore, invited the Récollets, belonging to the
Franciscan order of the Catholic Church, to Quebec. Champlain thus expressed his concern in this regard:

"You will perceive that they are not savages to such an extent that they could not, in course of time, and in association with others...become civilized... with the French language they may also acquire French heart and spirit... It is a great wrong to let so many men be lost and see them perish at our door, without rendering them the succour... which can only be given with the princes and ecclesiastics, who alone have the power to do this."

Thus, from the very outset, colonization of the 'new lands' was seen in tandem with the dissemination of faith for both commercial as well as spiritual considerations. The contention here is not that spiritual considerations were a façade for the long-term material gains but only to suggest that there was a convergence between the missionary work and the colonial project.

The Récollets in Canada:

According to some other sources, however, it was a meeting of clergy at the Estates General at Paris held in 1614- and not Champlain- that decided to send four Récollets to New France. In any case, four Récollet missionaries arrived in New France. Of these, Father d'Olbeau proceeded to establish himself at Tadoussac, Jamey and du Plessis were to remain at Quebec, while the last one, Father le Caron, decided to take the mission in Huronia. Whatever their area of work may have been, the Récollets performed the functions of religious as well as secular clergy. Despite their enthusiasm, however, the missionaries did not find it easy to convert the natives to Christianity. They were entirely

---

14 Woodley quotes Champlain: "Neither do they know how to worship or pray to God and live for the most part like brute beasts; but I think in a short space they would be brought to be good Christians, if their country were planted, which they desire for the most part." *Canada's Romantic Heritage* by E.C. Woodley, Toronto 1940, p. 86.
17 *A History of Quebec*, Benjamin Suite, Montreal 1908, p. 20.
new to the environment of New France and adjustment to it was an agonizing experience in the beginning. Moreover, they had entirely misjudged the strength of the native’s conviction in the religion he had inherited from his ancestors. Whereas the missionaries took the superiority of their own faith for granted, the native was not to be easily convinced of the futility of his own religious traditions. In addition, the language barrier made it extremely difficult for Christianity to make any speedy headway among the Indian tribes.\textsuperscript{18} The apprehension that adoption of Christianity would alienate them from their society was also an inhibitory factor for the natives.

In 1620, the Récollets inaugurated the building of a monastery at Quebec named Notre-Dame des Anges\textsuperscript{19} near the St. Charles River. They were also granted 200 acres of land near their monastery with the purpose of setting up a permanent settlement for the prospective native converts. The monastery was meant to be self-dependent as far as possible, and the Récollet Fathers set a good example of initiative and industry by taking up the task of clearing the land granted them with a sense of urgency. What is more, they also used whatever influence they wielded in France to persuade some people to come and settle in the colony, and thus acted as agents of colonization during this period.\textsuperscript{19}

The Récollet order suffered from financial constraint, for even though their own expenses were borne by the Company of Merchants, they did not have any independent resources to provide any impetus to their missionary work in the colony.\textsuperscript{20} Nevertheless, they contributed to the making of the colony in many other ways, and it was a Récollet missionary, Father Gabriel Sagard, arriving in New France in 1623, who wrote what is


\textsuperscript{19} \textit{Canada’s Romantic Heritage}, E.C. Woodley, Toronto 1940, p. 88.

\textsuperscript{20} \textit{History of Quebec}, Benjamin Suite, Montreal 1908, p. 21.
described as the first history of Quebec. Though concentrating more on the Récollets themselves than on the general evolution of the colony, his work still provides precious information on the early developments in New France. 21 Though Sagard's work is prone to give the impression that there was little convergence between the Récollets and the other residents of the colony, it is important to remember that there was no atmosphere of general mistrust between them, due partly to the fact that they all wanted to exclude the Huguenots from the budding colony. Thus, the first meeting of the church in Quebec, attended by Champlain and six other laymen, decided to exclude these religious dissenters from the colony. 22

The Récollets were convinced that the only way evangelization could accomplish its mission in New France was by making the natives adopt a sedentary life, so that they could be imparted the sort of education that the missionaries considered desirable. To their mind, nomadic life was another feature of a 'savage' existence, and, therefore, it needed to be replaced by a settled agricultural life. There is nothing surprising about this perception on the part of the missionaries. Familiar as they were with the hoards of vagabonds in their own country, they promptly equated nomadic life in Canada with indolence and lack of culture. To their mind, hunting, the occupation of most Indian tribes, was not an occupation but a leisure activity, which it indeed was in Europe.

The Jesuits Replace the Récollets:

During the first ten years of their arrival in New France, the Récollets gradually realized the hopelessness of their situation. Throughout these years, there were only five of them

21 Ibid.
in the colony and even their expenses were met by the company only grudgingly. Faced
with this difficult situation, therefore, the Récollets decided to appeal to the Jesuits to join
forces in the nascent colony—an appeal that the latter were only too willing to accept.
The advent of the Jesuits in New France was not without its complications. As mentioned
earlier, the Huguenot merchants of the company were antagonistic to the Jesuits, who
were widely seen to be the vanguard of Catholic revivalism sweeping Europe. Though
unable to prevent them from reaching the colony, the Huguenot owners of the company
were unwavering in their resolve to harass them in every possible manner they could
visualize. Thus, on their arrival, Jean Brebeuf, Ennemond Massé, who had been in
Acadia earlier, Charles Lalement and two lay brothers, Gilbert Buret and François Biret
were extended little co-operation by the agents of the company and were even refused a
residence there at the expense of the company.

However, the Jesuits were a seasoned lot and they had the support of some influential
sections of the French ruling class, including that of Cardinal Richelieu, which
immunized them against the machinations of the Huguenots. Considering the fact that,
by this time, the Counter-Reformation had achieved remarkable success all over Europe,
symbolized in France in 1628 in the attack on the Huguenot stronghold of La Rachelle,
the Jesuits were naturally more confident of their mission in New France. In any case,
they possessed considerable resources of their own, which ensured that they were not at
the mercy of the company.

There is reason to believe that even though the Récollets had been the ones to invite the
Jesuits to Quebec, they were not entirely happy with their decision, for the latter soon

23 A History of Quebec, Benjamin Suite, Montreal 1908, p. 21.
24 Ibid.
25 Ibid
started overshadowing them in the colony.\textsuperscript{26} Before the differences between the two orders could aggravate any further, however, Quebec passed into the hands of the English pirate, Kirke and his brothers and remained in their possession until 1632. The treaty of \textit{St. Germain en Laye} restored to the French all their possessions in New France, and thus Quebec reverted to the control of the Company of One Hundred Associates.

In the meanwhile, however, the Récollets had fallen on bad days. When Quebec was handed back to the French in 1632, the Capuchins, another Catholic order, were assigned the responsibility of missionary activity in the colony, to the exclusion of both the Récollets and the Jesuits\textsuperscript{27}. At this point, however, the Jesuit influence at the court and among the shareholders of the company, many of whom were highly devoted Christians, proved to be decisive, and they got the decision reversed in their own favour. Excluded from the mission initiated by their order, the Récollets appealed to the Pope, who extended their mission at Quebec for ten years, even though they could not reach Quebec due to the refusal of Jean de Lauzon, the Intendant of the company, to convey them to the colony\textsuperscript{28}. These incidents that led to the exclusion of Récollets are a stark reminder of the rivalry and intrigue that played an important role in determining relations between the different sections of the clergy. The problems of this nature would keep occurring throughout the history of New France.

On their return to Quebec in 1632 on the ship of the Huguenot merchant, De Caen, the Jesuits, in a symbolic gesture, chose the former Récollet monastery for their residence. From this point onwards, the missionary labours in the colony were concentrated on

\textsuperscript{26} Cornelius J. Jaenen, \textit{The Role of the Church in New France}, Ottawa 1976, p. 5.
\textsuperscript{27} Abbé Auguste Gosselin, \textit{La Mission du Canada avant Mgr de Laval}, Evereux, 1909, p. 53.
\textsuperscript{28} Ibid. pp. 54-60.
education, missions among the natives, and, later on, charitable work reflected in the opening of a hospital.

Conversions among the Hurons:

The Hurons were the first Indian tribe to attract the Jesuits. They had had an alliance with the French for some time, and had good trade relations with the latter. The factor that attracted the Jesuits to them was that they had settled villages and were quite populous at the time.\(^{29}\) What was more, they were willing to accept the missionaries among them, in exchange for trade relations with the French. For the Hurons, the missionaries were probably no more than a minor irritant, who had to be accommodated for the sake of continued good relations with their French allies.

This is not to state that that the Jesuits did not receive any 'success' among the Hurons. On the contrary, in the very first year of their sojourn with the Hurons, they were successful in 'converting' some dying Indians to Christianity\(^ {30}\). While many of the children and adults thus 'baptized' did eventually survive\(^ {31}\), there is hardly any reason to believe that they understood any thing about their new faith. Indeed, it is even doubtful that they at all understood the implications of their 'conversion'.

The advent of the missionaries among the Indians caused a spread of epidemics like smallpox and diphtheria\(^ {32}\). As a tragic consequence of this scourge, a large number of natives, who had little natural resistance to these epidemics that were new to them, succumbed to

---


\(^{30}\) *The Jesuit Relations and Allied Documents*, 75 Vols., Reuben de Thwaites, Cleveland, 1896-1901, XVI, p. 93.

\(^{31}\) Ibid.

their attacks\(^\text{33}\). What complicated matters even more was the fact that relatively few missionaries and other Frenchmen suffered from these diseases, which apparently led the natives to believe that their spread was a deliberate act on the part of the former\(^\text{34}\). In this light, baptism acquired sinister motives in the minds of many natives, for it was followed so often by the death of the person concerned.

To their dismay, thus, the Jesuits realized that baptism of the dying natives was not such a good strategy after all. Put on their guard in this manner, the Jesuits quickly changed their tactics and converted some healthy people, including some children, in order to prevent any such impression gaining ground\(^\text{35}\). By 1636, they had succeeded in baptizing eighty-six Hurons\(^\text{36}\), though it is important to remember that these converts looked upon baptism more as a healing ritual than anything else. Gradually, the Jesuits started gaining the confidence of the natives, who came to have some faith in the healing powers of the Fathers. It is possible that the Hurons gave them some credit for keeping the Iroquois danger at bay\(^\text{37}\). Apart from all this, there was always the possibility of getting an odd gift from the Jesuits that must have attracted some natives, especially the children\(^\text{38}\).

It is to be remembered that whatever the Jesuits may have believed, the natives who were baptized by them did not understand its significance. Whereas those who died soon after their baptism may have been ‘saved’ according to the Jesuits’ belief, those who did

\(^{33}\) According to some estimates, a full half of the Huron population had died a few years after coming into contact with the missionaries. See *Economy and Society during the French Regime*, ed. Cross and Kealey, Toronto 1983, Vol. I Article by Bruce G. Trigger, p. 154.

\(^{34}\) *Relations of Jesuits*, 1637, J.R. XIV, p. 40 – 42 and 46. In order to avoid the problems associated with administering baptism to dying people, the Jesuits even started doing it secretly.

\(^{35}\) Reuben G. Thwaites, ed., *The Jesuit Relations and Allied Documents*, 75 volumes, Cleveland 1896-1901, Vol. X, P. 69. The Jesuits baptized three girls in December 1635, and by the end of the month, 27 more children and adults were baptized. Ibid.

\(^{36}\) Ibid., X, p. 11.


survive frequently turned, much to the chagrin of the missionaries, apostate to their ‘new faith’. The chief problem facing the missionaries was that the faith they sought to propagate among the natives was evidently at variance with the native way of life, and the latter saw no need to change their culture. For the Jesuits, it was easy enough to ‘baptize’ an Indian on the verge of death, since the natives regarded ‘baptism’ more as a healing ritual involving magic than a change of faith.

What was really difficult was to persuade the few survivors to live a Christian life, which, in theory at least, involved a complex web of cultural and moral beliefs, frequently incompatible with those of the natives.

For the record, the Jesuits ‘converted’ thousands of ‘pagans’ to Christianity and, in 1640, the numbers added up to eighteen hundred - a large figure considering the total population of Huronia estimated between fifteen and thirty thousand. There was, however, a tragic side to the whole drama. The natives had to pay a heavy price for the Jesuit enthusiasm to initiate them into the Christian life. We have mentioned above the spread of epidemics among the Indians as a result of contact with the missionaries. In the course of time, the tragedy would only multiply. By the middle of the century, death had destroyed whole communities of Indians.

In the meantime, however, the Jesuits had incurred the wrath of the Hurons. In a situation where thousands of them were dying as a result of the epidemics carried by the Europeans, they were naturally led to believe that getting rid of the Jesuits was the surest

40 In fact, the period that witnessed the most devastating effects of epidemics coincided with the largest number of ‘baptisms’. Father Ragueneau has this to say in this regard: “I might say that never has this country been more sorely afflicted than we see it now and never has the Faith appeared at a greater advantage.” Relation of Jesuits, 1649—50, p. 74.
41 Relation of 1638, p. 38.
way to fight the recurrent disease. To be sure, the natives did not comprehend, nor did the missionaries for that matter, the real cause of these outbreaks, and they seem to have believed that the Jesuits were behind these maladies afflicting them, attributing it to latter’s witchcraft. The belief led many Huron notables to reflect seriously over the crisis. In March 1640, a general assembly of the Huron confederacy almost decided the execution of Jesuits for what the natives regarded was a deliberate act of sabotage on their part. The Hurons, however, did not kill the Jesuits, largely because they intended to maintain their trade relations with their French allies and in the event of the killing of the Jesuits, these relations were likely to be jeopardised.

The Huron attitudes towards the Jesuits need to be placed within the framework of cooperation versus resistance to the latter’s intrusion into their culture and society. Whereas the missionaries piously believed that they were doing what they were doing for the glory of true God and true religion, the natives were naturally attached to their own way of life. In fact, it would be anachronistic to pose the question as to why the Hurons were not more receptive to the Jesuits’ endeavours, as that would presume an inherent superiority for the Jesuits’ faith. Curiously enough, as a stark reminder of judging the past on the basis of the present, the question as to why the newcomers did not convert fast enough is often asked, even though the question as to why the newcomers did not convert to the faith of the natives has never yet been raised. That the Hurons resisted the evangelical efforts of the missionaries should not, therefore, cause any surprise, as that was a natural reaction on the part of the natives.

The fact that the natives were more or less forced to accept the Jesuits amongst them holds a lot of meaning for us, in that it lays bare one of the chief instruments of French entrenchment into the fledgling colony. In this, of course, the settlers were helped by the fact that the natives, particularly the Hurons, got used, before long, to the European goods, especially the iron tools, and found it difficult, if not impossible, to manage without them. This dependence emanated partly from the backdrop of intertribal rivalry in which the party having superior quality tools and weaponry would always have a better chance of winning. Thus, the advent of European supplies in the native society caused something of a crisis, as far as their autonomous, tribal social structure was concerned. The tensions generated in the process led on occasion to what is described as ‘punishment’ meted out by the French authorities at Quebec to the natives for their alleged ill-treatment of the Jesuits. Effective perhaps in arresting any open outbreak of hostilities against the missionaries, ‘punishment’ could also have had the effect of intensifying the native resistance by suppressing its manifestations.

The Indians who did ‘convert’ to Catholicism, whatever the nature of their ‘conversion’, were confronted with a difficult choice. To the extent that Christianity, as preached by the Jesuits, was not merely belief in a particular kind of God but an intricate system of cultural and moral beliefs, it was bound to come into conflict with the native culture and religion. Whereas the native religious traditions were well adapted to their mode of life, Christianity was difficult to fit into that mode. The native came face to face with his religion in nearly every aspect of his life from hunting, harvesting, curing the diseases, to

---

44 Ibid.
any conceivable activity. A change of faith was thus bound to put him at odds with the rest of the community, which continued to practice the ancestral traditions. Jerome Lallement, a well-known Jesuit missionary working among the natives, was gradually able to grasp the broad content of the issue, though his own sense of Christianity and European culture as being the true religion and true culture was too powerful a barrier to permit him to get into the heart of the matter:

"The greatest opposition that we meet consists in the fact that their remedies for diseases; their greatest amusements when in good health; their fishing, their hunting and their trading; the success of their crops, of their wars, and of their councils, almost all abound in diabolical ceremonies. To be a Christian one must deprive oneself not only of pastimes, and of the dearest pleasures of life, but even of the most necessary things."

There is reason to believe that evangelization of the natives also led to a heightened sense of spiritual and moral insecurity among them. The Jesuits obviously could not appreciate the fact that the strength one derives from one's faith is that of faith itself, and does not have much to do with the truth of the faith. Deprived of their primeval sense of moral security, the converts were implored to turn to Christian modes of worship, which were incomprehensible and unhelpful for them. The complete change of life demanded by evangelization was the best possible way of arousing the hostility of the larger community to which the convert belonged.

It is evident by now that the Huron society was deeply shaken as a result of contact with the missionaries. The biggest concern was reserved for their conversion of the natives to

---

46 Ibid. Vol., XXI, P. 161-63.; XXX, P. 43-45. Despite the fact the converts could not feel satisfied with the spiritual merits of their new faith, the Jesuits opposed any recourse to the native rituals and customs. Ibid.
47 Ibid.
what the latter perceived as an incomprehensible, alien way of life. Attached to the faith of their ancestors, they targeted the converts, whom they saw as disruptive elements, for their repudiation of the time-honoured community norms. The converts' material aggrandizement—resulting from their contact with the Jesuits—their lack of support for the rituals supposedly needed to guarantee good crops, non-participation in the healing rituals—all these often brought the matters to the edge. Thus the Jesuits mention the story of a man who was kicked out of his family due to his conversion and had to survive by begging.

The Christian-European notions of premarital sexual morality preached by the Jesuits were impracticable in the native mode of life. Among the Hurons, as among other natives, young people were accorded absolute freedom to associate with one another without any notion of segregation based on gender, and they were free to choose their spouse. This was in striking contrast with the practices prevalent in seventeenth century France, where marriages were fixed by the parents of the parties concerned, and premarital relationships, especially premarital sex, were denounced as immoral.

The young native converts were expected to refrain from such ‘immoral’ practices. Consequently, they shunned mixing with the members of the opposite sex, which often led to their failure to find a spouse for themselves, as there was no other mechanism in the native society of finding one’s partner. The Jesuits mention the amusing story of the young man who requested his uncle to find a wife for him, as he could not participate in

48 Ibid., XXX, P. 19-21. The converts were suspected of witchcraft in collaboration with the Jesuits. Ibid.
49 Ibid.
50 This man, Ossossane, the only Christian in his family, was accused of causing the death of his niece who had also been baptized. Upon his refusal to embrace the ancestral faith, he was denied food, and was eventually expelled from his home. Later, he was boycotted by the whole society. Ibid. Vol. XXIII, p. 67.
the courtship rituals forbidden by his new faith. In many cases, the community tried to win back the converts to the ancestral faith by using women to tempt them.

One of the most important reasons that led to hostility against the converts was their refusal to participate in healing rituals of the community. It was commonly believed by the natives that this refusal emanated from clandestine designs to practice witchcraft against the tribe to bring about its ruin. The demise of large number of people as a result of the spread of epidemics was blamed on the head of converts.

Side by side with the progress of the evangelical movement, the Hurons continued to die in large numbers due to the diseases carried by the Jesuits. As mentioned previously, over half the population was wiped out in this manner. As far as the Jesuits were concerned, they neither lost heart nor hesitated in extending their activities to other native tribes, wherever possible. For them, death, their own or that of the natives, was not the major concern, as long as the soul could be redeemed. In an attempt to extend the scope of their evangelical work, the Jesuits carried Christianity to the neighbouring tribes. As early as 1639, Father Jogues visited the Tobacco Nation to spread Christianity, though without much success. In 1642, he was captured by the Iroquois and tortured brutally, and it was eventually at the hands of these inveterate enemies of the French in North America that he was killed. Father Brebeuf had, in the meantime, tried to enlist the support of the neighbouring Neutral Nation and had even visited them, causing misgivings and apprehensions of conspiracy among his Huron hosts. Similarly, Father Druillettes made

---

52 Ibid.
53 Ibid. p. 33-37. Not all such attempts were successful. The Jesuits mention the story of a woman who had failed to seduce a convert concluded that Christianity must be a powerful force to enable him to resist such temptations. Ibid.
54 Ibid., Vol. XXIII, p. 85-89. The Jesuits mention the story of Tsondatsaa, a convert to Christianity. He refused to participate in a dance to secure the healing of his sick niece. Ibid.
55 Ibid., XXIII, p. 43-53.
some incipient efforts to spread the evangelical movement among the natives of Tadoussac and New Brunswick.

Conflict between The Hurons and Iroquois:

Mention has been made in the course of this chapter as to how the Iroquois confederacy of Five Nations was antagonized from the very outset by the French establishment at Quebec. With their partially sedentary life involving elementary agriculture and village settlements, they were determined to drive out the French explorers and later settlers from their posts in the Laurentian valley, due mainly to what they rightly perceived as an alliance between the French and the Hurons and other Amerindian tribes created in order to contain the Iroquois influence. Whereas the Iroquois had fought against the Hurons, who were a kindred tribe, for some time prior to the materialization of this alliance, there can be no denying the fact that the advent of the French among the natives of the region led to an escalation of the intertribal warfare, though this should not be interpreted to imply that it was the result of premeditation on the part of the colonists. By 1640, the warfare between the Hurons and the Iroquois confederacy had reached a turning point, after which the latter came to have a decisive upper hand. The depopulation of the Huron settlements due to the devastating effects of epidemics was undoubtedly instrumental in their repeated losses against their enemies. Right through the following decade, the Iroquois continued to attack the Hurons and kill them in large numbers. The Iroquois raids on Huronia resulted in the killing of about a hundred Hurons in 1643, after which death and destruction loomed large over the Huron missions. Thus, in 1648,

57 George T. Hunt, *Wars of the Iroquois*, p. 36 and appendix A. The inter-tribal conflict intensified as a result of the fur trade rivalry between the French and the Dutch, with the latter trying to divert the furs going to Montreal to Fort Orange. The Iroquois were used for this purpose. Ibid.
58 *Relations of Jesuits*, J.R., 1643, XXVI, P. 180; 1643-45, XXVIII, p. 44.
Father Daniel was martyred at the hands of the invading Iroquois, while the following year, Fathers Brebeuf and Lalemant, who had played a seminal role in the Huron missions, were killed at the hands of the Iroquois. Soon after this, another Jesuit, Father Garnier, was killed by the Iroquois. Undeterred by these serious reverses, however, the Jesuits decided to take their mission to the Iroquois themselves. While they did not achieve any notable success in this daring endeavour, some Iroquois were eventually converted to Christianity by the missionary labours of the tenacious Jesuits.

Education of the natives to Christianize and ‘Francisize’ them was a charge that the missionaries considered a natural corollary to their evangelical work among them. As early as 1620, the Recollets had built at Quebec what they, in a eulogistic vein, described as the Seminary of Notre Dames –des Anges, with the purpose of teaching some native children on the pattern of the education system prevalent in France. This experiment did not achieve much success, primarily because the French education, both its content and the mode of teaching, which the missionaries wished to impart to these children was completely irrelevant to their society.

On their return to Quebec in the wake of the treaty of St. Germain en Laye in 1632, the Jesuits decided to revive the project of educating the natives. Consequent upon this decision, they moved fast and, in 1636, established another seminary at the old location, where they started teaching six Huron boys. Later on, this school was moved to the ‘reservation’ of Sillery, founded with a view to segregate the natives from what the

60 Ibid.
61 Relation of 1655- 56, XLII, p. 60- 215; 1656- 57, XLIII, p. 134- 85, 282. The Iroquois mission was organized by the Le Moyné, Dablon and Chaumont. Father Le Moyné worked among the Mohawks, while the other two worked among the Onondagas. Ibid.
64 Ibid.
missionaries regarded was their pagan life prior to coming into contact with Christianity. By this time, the natives at the reserves were mostly adults, who were kept under the strict supervision of the Jesuits to keep them away from all 'corrupting' influences.

In their educational work among the natives, the Jesuits were assisted, from 1639 onwards, by the arrival of the Ursulines at Quebec. These nuns, working under the ever-vigilant supervision of the Jesuits, put themselves to the task of educating both the native as well as the French girls. Thus, by the next year, they were successful in cajoling some eighteen native girls, mostly from the Huron tribe, to reside at the reservation for their education. The progress of this work was seriously jeopardized, once the Iroquois attacks on the Hurons brought the latter en masse to the reserves for shelter. In 1654, the Mohawks raided these reserves themselves, and captured more than five hundred native allies of the French. This gave a serious setback to all the educational work among the natives.

Beginnings of the Colonial Church:

In addition to the education of the natives, the Jesuits and other members of religious orders had to take into account the educational needs of the colonists as well. Influential as the Jesuits were, they had succeeded in securing a grant of 3,000 livres per annum from Marquis de Gumaches and his wife. Out of this grant, they founded in 1635 what was the first college in North America. This college at Quebec provided primary education in the beginning, while instruction of a higher level had to wait until

---

65 Ibid. This model was favored by Father Paul Le Jeune, and was adopted from successful experiments in Mexico and Paraguay. Ibid.
66 Ibid.
67 Ibid., p.98.
68 Ibid.
1650\textsuperscript{69}. There is evidence to show that small though this Jesuit college may have been, it did maintain certain standards of education from the very beginning—the standards for which it became quite well-known in the course of time. What has been described as the colonial church in New France evolved gradually with the emergence of the Laurentian colony, constituted by the colonists from different parts of France. Since the Huguenots were excluded from the colony in 1628, the colonial church, as it developed in New France, was the Catholic Church. In the period under review in this chapter, only the broad contours of this church had emerged. While the Récollets and the Jesuits had had a strong presence in the colony, it was the appointment of a bishop at Quebec that really marks the beginning of an organized church in New France. It was in 1634 that the idea of creating a bishopric in the colony was first mooted by the Congregation of the Propaganda. This proposal was, however, thwarted by Cardinal Richelieu, partly because the choice suggested by the Congregation involved a Récollet, who did not find much favour with him. In 1645, Quebec came very close to having a bishop of its own, when all the concerned parties had agreed to the appointment of Le Gauffre, a member of the Society of Notre Dame, Paris. Before the proposal could materialize, however, Le Gauffre passed away. A few years later, in 1650 to be more precise, the Company of New France came up with the idea of appointing one of the Jesuits already resident in the colony as the Bishop of Quebec. The Jesuits could not but have welcomed such an opportunity, but they were forbidden by their vows to assume ecclesiastical office. Therefore, nothing came out of this proposal.

\textsuperscript{69} Ibid. There was an emphasis on scholastic content in higher education, with the Ratio Studiorum as the main text. Ibid.
Thus far, conditions in the colony had worked in favour of the Jesuits. After the exclusion of the Récollets in 1632, they were the only order represented at Quebec, and had thus monopolized the whole spiritual domain, the Ursulines and the Hospital Nuns working under their guidance and leadership. The first blow to the Jesuits was delivered by the Sulpicians' entry into the colony in 1656. The next year, Abbe de Queylus, a Sulpician and a member of the Society of Notre Dame, was put forward as the prospective Bishop of Quebec. The Jesuits, as one might expect, perceived this development as a threat to their own position, and they tried to have their own nominee selected for the ecclesiastical office. The Jesuits' influence at the French court proved to be decisive in this instance, and they were able to secure the appointment as Bishop of François de Laval, who, though not a Jesuit, had been taught by them, and had imbibed the qualities most cherished by his mentors.

It was the appointment of Laval as the Bishop at Quebec that heralded the coming to age of the church in New France, though it is important to remember that Quebec had not been made a bishopric and that Laval was simply the titular bishop of Petraea in Arabia and was technically only the Vicar Apostolic for New France. Soon after his arrival at Quebec in 1659, Laval launched himself into organizing the colonial church according to the principles of the Counter-Reformation he had learnt from the Jesuits. We shall return to this theme in the next chapter.