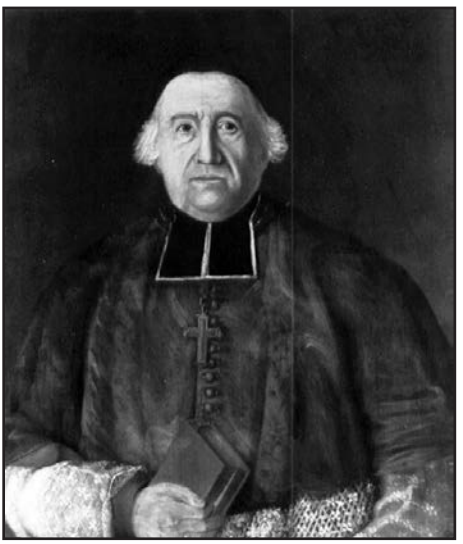
The Rebellion That Succeeded

Part 1: September 8, 1836

by Joseph Graham

In a recent discussion about the rebellions of the 1830s, including the one led by Louis-Joseph Papineau, I remarked that another 1830s rebellion had actually succeeded and that the change had been monumental. Asked to explain my statement, I referred to a talk I had given called "La rébellion qui a réussie: le 8 septembre 1836" (The Rebellion that Succeeded, September 8, 1836).

The successful rebellion was guided by the Catholic Church and was the direct result of the Ultramontane movement in France. The Church did not govern the colony here, but had a responsibility for health and social services as well as education. It had its own system of taxation and it recorded births, marriages and deaths.



Before the French Revolution, the king held the right to veto decisions of the Church. He kept a lid on the power of Rome in France. Later, during the republican periods, the Ultramontanes argued that since there was no king, the French Catholic Church's sole absolute leader was the pope. The word Ultramontane was first used in Rome to describe influences from away, from beyond the mountains, but it came to be used as a term by those Catholics in republican France who felt that the pope's decisions were uniquely a Catholic religious matter. When France was a kingdom, the pope, ruler of the Papal States, had seen the French king as his defender, an ally he could turn to if his borders were threatened. In return, French (Gallican) Church policy and appointments were subject to royal approval. The Catholic Church in New France was also Gallican Catholic, subject to the same royal assent.

When the British took possession of New France, the Catholic Church dutifully transferred its allegiance from the French king to the English king. Their policy, as written by the then-bishop of Quebec, Henri-Marie de Pontbriand, stated, "The Christian religion requires for victorious princes who have conquered a country all the obedience, the respect, that is owed to the others … The king of England now being, through conquest, the sovereign of Quebec, all the feelings of which the apostle St. Paul speaks are due him [Rom. 13:1–7]."

This policy was more easily written than executed, especially considering that Pontbriand died in June 1760 -- before the treaty with France was signed. This left an opening for a new bishop, but one could not be appointed without the king's approval. The transfer of the Gallican Catholic Church fell to Pontbriand's vicar, Jean-Olivier Briand, who proved to be very much up to the task, bringing the Church into the ambit of the king of England just as thoroughly as it had previously been subject to the king of France. He even found a way around a British law forbidding the naming of a Catholic bishop. He proposed having himself quietly consecrated in France as Bishop of Quebec, which he did in 1766 while the British looked the other way. Serving as Bishop of Quebec until his death in 1794, Briand so calmed tensions that he eventually told his secretary: "Under the British

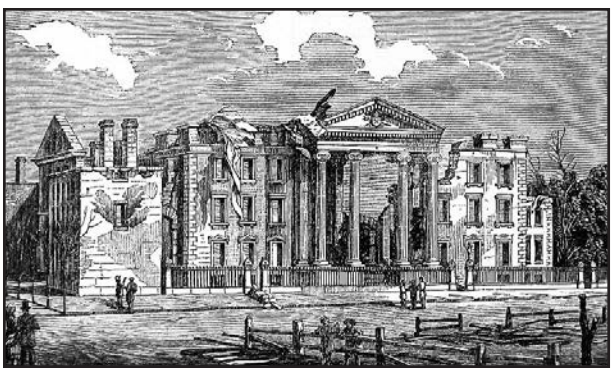
Louis-Chrétien de Heer, "Mgr Jean-Olivier Briand," c.1788. Musée de la civilisation, Fabrique Notre-Dame de Québec repository.

government the Catholic clergy and the rural populace enjoyed more liberty than they had been accorded before the conquest." It was even a point of contention for the Anglican bishop of Quebec, Jacob Mountain, who declared in the mid-1790s that the Catholic bishop "disposes as he sees fit of all the curacies in the diocese, sets up parishes, grants special permission for marriages as he wishes, and carries out freely all those duties that the king's instructions refuse him."

Briand's successor, Joseph-Octave Plessis, found ways around British refusals by ploys such as the one that saw Father Jean-Jacques Lartigue become the acting bishop of Montreal. Having been refused the right to establish a new diocese at Montreal, but very much needing a bishop to administer the region, Plessis petitioned the pope to name Lartigue as "Bishop of Telmessus in Lycia," a region that had not been a part of the Catholic Church for centuries and was, of course, outside British jurisdiction. In 1820, the Church named Lartigue as bishop of that Ottoman outpost, conferring all the authority of a bishop on him. The next year, the Bishop of Telmessus was consecrated as auxiliary bishop serving in Montreal. He observed the casual way the British administration accepted his appointment, after having refused the creation of the new diocese, and learned an interesting lesson that would serve him well in time.

This bishop without a local diocese, Jean-Jacques Lartigue, was a passionate follower of the French Ultramontane movement. One of Lartigue's first actions, working with his secretary Ignace Bourget, was to set up a seminary that became an Ultramontane training ground, graduating priests who believed in and taught Papal Infallibility forty years before the Vatican adopted it as official policy.

Lartigue also saw that, if the civil powers, led by his cousin, Louis-Joseph Papineau, could learn to be more patient with their colonial overlords, both lay and Church powers would grow. Lartigue did not need more authority than that of his faithful congregation to make decisions. To demonstrate this, in 1836, fifteen years after he was named Bishop of Telmessus, he asked the pope, on behalf of his parishioners, to create an episcopal see at Montreal, naming him bishop. This was exactly what the British had refused to condone in 1821. He also asked his colleague, Bishop Joseph-Norbert Provencher, who was on his way to Rome, to reassure the authorities that there was no need to obtain "the British government's consent to or approval of such an arrangement." On May 13, 1836, Pope Gregory XVI published a Bull creating the See and naming Lartigue its bishop. While the clergy held its breath in anxious anticipation of repercussions from the British, Lartigue believed that, faced with a fait accompli, the colonial secretary would approve. Lartigue received public confirmation of the pope's consent on May 26, and within two weeks, also received a note of congratulations from the governor's office.



It was as though the governor of the colony saw nothing irregular in the appointment and simply wanted to be polite in acknowledging the bishop's new status. The governor's office may have thought no more about it but the clergy did. They knew that it signalled a major shift in the Catholic Church in Lower Canada. Catholic Lower Canada was no longer Gallican, nor was it British. It was Roman. The whole body of the clergy of Lower Canada fully understood the ramifications and there was much enthusiasm among them when Bishop Lartigue of Montreal took official possession of his see on September 8, 1836, the autumn before the secular uprising led by Louis-Joseph Papineau.

As historian Marcel Trudel put it, Lartgue had "the courage to make the first gesture of absolute independence," and the ramifications were huge, fully exploited by his successor, Ignace Bourget.

***Joseph Graham**, author of* Naming the Laurentians*, is writing a book that re-examines much of our early history, the elements that drove European society, and the damage these ideas inflicted on North America. The foregoing is an excerpt, and is based on a talk presented to the Société d'histoire de la Repousse in Saint-Faustin-Lac Carré on March 30, 2012, which was then adapted for* Main Street *(the Laurentians' English-language newspaper) in 2016.*

Sources:

Fernand Ippersiel, *Les Cousins Ennemis*, Guérin Littérature, Montreal, 1990.

Adrien Thério, *Joseph Guibord, victime expiatoire de l'Évêque Bourget*, Montreal, 2000.

Dictionary of Canadian Biography online.

Top Left: Gerrit Schipper, "Joseph-Octave Plessis." Library and Archives Canada, MIKAN 2882492. Top Right: J.-F. Lartigue. www.diocesemontreal.org.

Bottom: John Henry Walker, "Ruins of the Roman Catholic Bishop's Palace, Montreal, 1852." McCord Museum, M752.

The Rebellion that Succeeded

Part II: Bishop Ignace Bourget

by Joseph Graham

One of the most influential people in Canadian history is barely explored in the history books, and that would be just fine by him.

Ignace Bourget had been Jean-Jacques Lartigue's right hand man since 1821. Lartigue named him his successor as Bishop of Montreal four years before he died, in 1840. Bourget would take Lartigue's initiatives to dizzying new levels, changing the fabric of Quebec society and the direction of history.

Both men were Ultramontane, believers in the central power of the pope, but it was the young, energetic Bourget who took their ideas forward. His diocese ran from James Bay to the American border, and from Upper Canada to the boundary of the diocese of the Bishop of Quebec, and he was present, encouraging and expanding religious centres of education. He went to Europe, spending time in France, which was undergoing a period of religious growth. His objective was recruitment and he found new Sulpicians to come and join the order in Montreal, as well as Oblates, Jesuits, Sisters of the Society of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, and Sisters of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd. He also had occasion to impress the new pope, Pius IX, who would become the first pope to endorse the notion of papal infallibility, and who would come to consider Bourget as the guiding spirit of the Canadian episcopate. Back home, he helped form the communities of the Sisters of the Holy Names of Jesus and Mary, the Sisters of Providence, the Sisters of Mercy and the Sisters of St. Anne. His objective was to ensure the Catholic nature of his see, but he went well beyond that, encouraging the creation of a new see in Toronto and ultimately in Ottawa, as well as the creation of the ecclesiastical province of Quebec.

Before dismissing all of this as irrelevant religious history, we must consider Bourget's extreme anti-liberalism, the political influence that the Church was cultivating, and Lartigue's earlier opposition to the Patriote movement. The election of Reformers in Canada East in the 1840s and the divisions encouraged between them and the Parti Rouge, led by Jean-Baptiste Étienne Dorion, reveal the Church's strategy.

To understand the role of the Church, we must recall that Catholics were dependent upon its hospitals, primary and secondary schooling, and social services. The

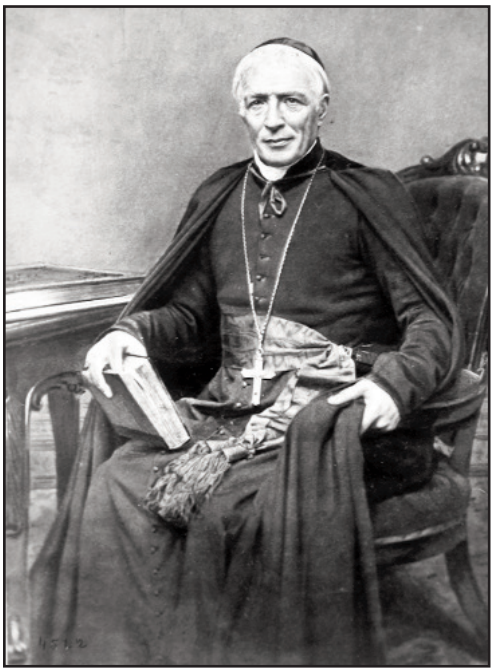
Erskine Church, from the Montreal Gazette Illustrated Supplement, *December 25, 1865.*

Church was also responsible for the civil registry of Catholics. These same files account for roughly 75% of the total budget of the Quebec government today. When the British Colonial Office left the choice of the new bishop to the Church, it was trusting in the traditional relationship that the two parties had formed since the 1760s when France abandoned New France. There was no reason to distrust the Catholic Church; it existed at the whim of the King of England and looked after a colonial people who were not of British descent. It was unthinkable that it could in any way threaten the Anglican Church in Lower Canada and the British Colonial Office had little patience for any other religions. In fact, it was Louis-Joseph Papineau, leading the Parti Canadien, who first stood up for the religious rights of the Jews. Before these two bishops, Lartigue and Bourget, the Catholic Church was answerable to the Colonial Office; after 1836, it wasn't – as we saw in the first part of this series.

Early in the 1830s, the Parti Canadien became the Parti Patriote, and its leader, Louis-Joseph Papineau, was leading the secular powers on a collision course with the Colonial Office. Their issues were similar to those of the American Patriots of just two generations earlier, but while the American Patriots managed to control their lower classes, the Lower Canadian Patriotes had to compete with the Church for support and control. Bishop Lartigue (who was Papineau's cousin, ironically) saw the Rebellion as a threat to the stability of the Church and an unnecessary risk. He publicly opposed the Rebellion and sent letters to his priests instructing them to condemn it from the pulpit.

After the failed rebellion, the real damage done to French Lower Canada was that the secular elite had been sidelined and no power remained to confront the newly reformed Roman Catholic Church of Lower Canada. The new French secular elite, led by Louis-Hippolyte LaFontaine, and the new Church, explored their common needs into the 1840s, and largely found that the Reformers' agenda did not conflict with the Church's priorities. Meanwhile, the remaining rebels promoted secularism and objected to the growing power of the Catholic Church; assuming that liberalism was inevitable, they headed for a second collision, this time with the Church itself.

Burdened with the forced union of Lower and Upper Canada, LaFontaine partnered with the Upper Canadian Reform Party, and eventually won a majority in the Assembly in 1848, obliging the governor to name him the first prime minister of the Province of Canada. To achieve the support he needed, he depended also on the Catholic Church, and in return, he accommodated it on issues that were strongly opposed by the secular republican Dorion and the Parti Rouge. LaFontaine's single-minded objective of ministerial responsibility blinded him to the dangers of the growing



powers that the Church wielded, while a divided French Catholic secular elite played into the hands of Bishop Bourget's Roman Catholic priorities.

A more powerful force that LaFontaine perceived he had to beat was the English-speaking business elite in Quebec and Montreal whose interests were best served by supporting an appointed governor who generally saw things through their eyes. They also had members running for seats in the Assembly. They were not an organized party and their interests were not necessarily the same as those of Canada West.

The idea of political parties was different from what it is today. They were a more casual union of people who agreed on a few fundamentals but who could vote as they wished. There was no concept of a party whip, forcing party members to toe the line.

LaFontaine accepted a partnership with Robert Baldwin and the Reformers of Upper Canada, and they worked together throughout the 1840s to win a majority of the seats in Upper Canada, or Canada West, where the Reform spirit was stronger. For his part, LaFontaine obliged the Church, and the Church delivered his majority in Canada East. The Parti Rouge was married to the concept of secularism and was officially opposed to the growing influence of the Church, having hopelessly underestimated just how great that power had already become under the stewardship of Bishop Lartigue and his successor, Bishop Bourget.

LaFontaine and Baldwin achieved their goal of creating our parliamentary democracy but they were both exhausted by 1849 and had no further vision of where to take this new society. Their last great act, the Rebellion Losses Bill, led to a failed uprising from the British elite in which the Parliament was burned. The uprising served only to confirm that the power of the British elite no longer flowed through the office of the governor, temporarily side-lining their influence. While Canada West was growing rapidly, Canada East was left in the hands of the Church, and it wasted no time. The next battle would be between the Church and its only remaining opposition, the liberal ideals of the Parti Rouge and the Institut Canadien. The absurdity of what happened next explains the Grand Noirceur, that period of deep civic slumber from which Quebec would only be awakened more than a century later, by the Quiet Revolution.

Sources:

Fernand Ippersiel, *Les Cousins Ennemis*, Montreal, 1990.

Thério, "Joseph Guibord, victime expiatoire de l'Évêque Bourget," *L'institut canadien et l'Affaire Guibord revisités*, 2000.

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Bishop Ignace Bourget, 1862. McCord Museum, I-4562.0.1.

The Rebellion that Succeeded

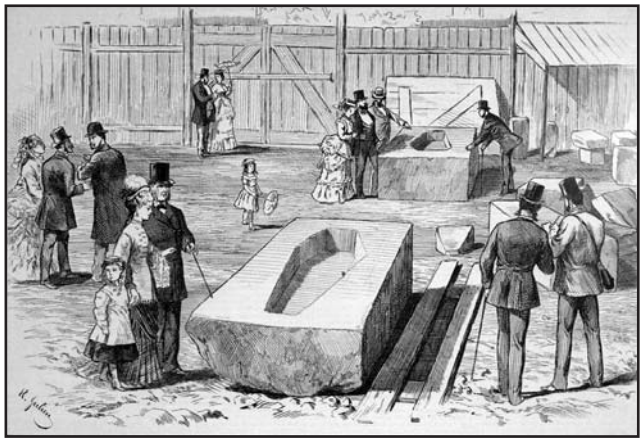
Part III: the Institut Canadien

by Joseph Graham

The Institut Canadien de Montréal, created in 1844, can be thought of as an early think tank, or in modern terms as a bubble, a small group of like-minded people living in the belief that they were representative, that everyone could see their self-evident truths and not fail to agree with them. Its members maintained a library and a room for debates. Some of the best secular minds of Lower Canada (subsequently Quebec) were members. It gave rise to the Parti Rouge, a political movement that opposed the forced amalgamation of Upper and Lower Canada and fought for separation of church and state as well as for universal suffrage. It wanted the government to be solely responsible for education and it opposed Confederation, favouring the American model of a republic to the point of encouraging annexation. Almost all of its goals ran against the interests of the Church.

Among the Institut's early members were Louis-Antoine Dessaules (nephew of Louis-Joseph Papineau), Jean-Baptiste-Eric Dorion, Francis Cassidy, and Joseph Papin, all co-founders, as well as men such as François-Xavier Garneau, author of the first history of Canada. After the turbulent years of the 1830s, the Institut Canadien was what remained of Quebec secular society. It appealed to neither the Church nor the English-speaking Protestant business community, yet most of its ideas were forward-looking and were already realities in the United States. It took until the end of the twentieth century for many of the ideas debated within its halls to succeed in becoming public policy here. Its members were Catholic but most had grown up under the Gallican form of Catholicism and considered the Church answerable to the State. Like the British, they seem to have completely missed Bishop Lartigue's sleight of hand.

Monsignor Ignace Bourget became Bishop of Montreal in 1840. During his 36-year tenure, he changed the way Catholics perceived themselves. In spite of his location in the hierarchy of the Catholic Church, being only the Bishop of Montreal, he was a favourite of Pope Pius IX. The pope, originally sympathetic to the liberal movements sweeping Europe, granted amnesty to revolutionaries in the Papal States, but, as his status as Sovereign of the Papal States continued to be challenged, he became increasingly authoritarian -- even to the point of proposing the concept of Papal Infallibility at the First Vatican Council in 1868. Bishop Bourget also tried to work with the Parti Rouge through the Institut Canadien but soon turned against them, perceiving their secular values as a threat to the authority of the Church.



Henri Julien, "The Stone Coffin Prepared for the Burial of Joseph Guibord." Canadian Illustrated News, *September 18, 1875.*

During this same period, the political reformers of the Province of Canada, led by Robert Baldwin and Louis-Hippolyte LaFontaine, were fighting a different battle. It had become clear that if a majority of any single party were elected to the Assembly, the governor would be obliged to acquiesce to the Assembly, creating a representative democracy by vesting ministerial authority on the representative group. The Lower Canadian opponents of LaFontaine and Baldwin, the Parti Rouge, pushed instead for the separation of the Province of Canada into its component parts and the creation of a republic. Coupled with their secular agenda, their ideas drove the Church to support the Reformers, who in turn acquiesced to most of the Church's demands. In Canada West, Assembly members who were opposed to the Reformers were composed of the old guard who obliged the governor and in return received favours and the illusion of authority. In 1848, the Reformers won the election, creating the parliamentary democracy model that continues today. In response, the Parti Rouge and the members of the Institut Canadien fought to maintain their secular agenda, especially against the ever more powerful Roman Catholic Church. They believed that their truth would become self-evident: that LaFontaine was, effectively, in bed with the British in spite of the fact that the British community of Montreal burned the Parliament Building in an angry rebellion against the authority given to the new government.

Overseas, the Italians won a major victory against the Papal States in the same year that Prime Minister LaFontaine took office. Their victory created the Republic of Rome, and virtually forced the Pope into internal exile in the Vatican. His war to save the Papal States from the Italian unification movement continued through the 1850s and 60s as the pope became increasingly authoritarian. In the meantime, Bourget mirrored this war by doing his best to destroy the Parti Rouge and the Institut Canadien. In 1858, he condemned their library and threatened excommunication to any Catholic who read certain of its books. This action broke the Institut in two, hardening the resolve of the original members who in 1864 petitioned the pope to intervene. Bourget took advantage of the war being waged against the Papal States to polarize Catholic society between the Church and the secular movement. In 1860, he called upon good Catholics to join the Zouaves, an international

Joseph Guibord. Canadian Illustrated News, *September 18, 1875.*

military force that was preparing for the defence of the Papal States, and by 1868 Catholic Canada had raised a regiment. 388 Canadian Catholics made the trip to the Papal States as members of the Canadian Zouave Regiment and the war became the focus of local news. The Canadian government, fearing the loss of Church support for its real preoccupation – to create a confederation – did not condemn this questionable military interference in international affairs, nor did the British. A Catholic expeditionary force had been raised and sent overseas without consultation or objection.

The following year, the pope not only neglected to intervene on behalf of the Institut, but instead put the Institut's *Annuaire* on the index of books that Catholics were not allowed to read. This meant, effectively, the excommunication of the members of the Institut. The pope owed Bishop Bourget. The Institut still could not see it. There would be no succor for them in the Vatican.

Still, the merciful parish priests preyed upon the older members of the Institut, offering them absolution on their deathbeds if they would simply renounce the Institut. Many did, but one of the founding members, Joseph Guilbord, had the courage of his convictions and refused the priest.

When Guilbord died, his wife was informed he could not be buried in the family plot of the Catholic Notre-Dame-des-Neiges Cemetery. Refusing to accept the decision, she took the Church to court and, with the backing of the Institut, began a five-year battle that resulted in a favourable ruling before the British Empire Court of Last Resort – and the financial exhaustion of the resources of the Institut Canadien. On September 2, 1875, the funeral cortege, exercising the judgement won in court, was turned away from the cemetery by a crowd of angry Catholics, no doubt encouraged by Bourget. Two-and-a-half months later, the burial was completed successfully with a military escort of 2,500 men, and the coffin was encased in concrete and scraps of metal to guarantee it would not be disinterred. The judgement of the court would stand. That night, Bishop Bourget personally deconsecrated the grave site.

Wilfrid Laurier of the Parti Rouge addressed the Institut Canadien on the absurdity of the eternal fight with the Church. He proposed instead joining the Parti Rouge to the Liberal Party of Upper Canada where he eventually became the leader. But before he could form a government, Laurier had to weather threats of excommunication, and wait. He would not succeed in forming a government until 1896, 11 years after Bishop Bourget's death, and it would not be until 1960 that Quebec Catholics finally emerged from the domination of the Roman Catholic Church.

Sources:

Fernand Ippersiel, *Les Cousins Ennemis*, Montreal 1990.

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