PARTIPRIESTS and FRÈREQUISTES?
Parti Pris, the Front de libération du Québec,
and the Catholicity of Québécois Anticlericalism, 1963-1970

by Carly Lynn Ciufo

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ABSTRACT

On March 7 1963, some bombs exploded at a few military barracks in Québec. These blasts announced the start of a campaign mounted by the Front de libération du Québec (FLQ). The founders of Parti Pris responded in intellectual solidarity with the FLQ’s motives by publishing their first issue in October. By 1968, Parti Pris ceased publication. After the October Crisis in 1970, the FLQ was widely discredited. Although many Partipristes and Felquistes dispersed into more generalized circles of local activism and party politics, they defined, informed, and mobilized a new generation of Québécois towards national liberation between 1963 and 1970. During their time of influence, Partipristes and Felquistes consistently pointed to a Catholic morality in Québec that revered passivity as a root cause and symptom of their colonial oppression. Some historians have suggested they were aberrant apostles of rupture with Québec’s history and traditions. This sort of reading finds some basis in declamations of the radicals themselves. But this thesis argues that both Parti Pris and the FLQ were developments of, and not definitive breaks with, Québec’s Catholic tradition. By analyzing the writings of Partipristes Paul Chamberland, André Major, and Pierre Maheu alongside those of Felquistes Pierre Vallières and Francis Simard, it claims that no historical appreciation of their lives and generation can sidestep the Catholicism that shaped them as individuals and the social milieu to which they responded.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The basic premise of this thesis would not have been possible without John Varty. As both a willing mentor and an able guide through the course of my decision to do graduate work, he was integral in encouraging the theological direction of my fourth year paper from which this thesis has grown. His support rounded off the many theories, professors, and courses that I was able to work with at McMaster University. The History, Political Science, and Peace Studies departments all gave me an incredibly open and encouraging environment in which to learn how to be an engaged student.

At Queen’s University, I have studied with a number of people who have taught me to think otherwise. To my fellow classmates in History 816, know that it was first with you where I felt comfortable to participate orally in a seminar setting. The ideas that we shared and challenged within that classroom serve as much of the theoretical foundations of this paper. To those who were willing to read my earlier drafts, no matter how nonsensical and ill-prepared for another person’s eyes they may have been, your comments have made this thesis all the better. To everyone else who has listened to my research ideas and progress, I am so thankful that you gave me the space to speak my mind. By allowing me to do so, you have all given me evermore confidence in my ideas.

Throughout this process, Ian McKay has been one of the largest sources of encouragement. He has been onboard with my thesis ever since the first email that I sent to him. For that I will be forever grateful. His attention to detail, insistence on the originality of my thought, and strong editing hand have all coalesced in trying to make sure that what I offer here has been written as clearly as possible. It is with his support as my supervisor that I have been able to complete my Masters degree in the way that I had originally envisioned. I am positive that what I have learned under him will serve me well throughout my life’s work. After all, writing is rewriting.

To my friends, you have been so supportive of me and my work even when you had no idea what Parti Pris or the FLQ were. Thank you for being genuinely interested in a topic that has academically captured my interest more than any other ever has. Of all the lovely people of whom I have been blessed to be surrounded by this year, Molly Egerdie is the best of them. She has pushed me into believing in my own work and intelligence more than any other friend ever has.

Last but certainly not least, I give the biggest thank you that I can muster to my family. My brothers have been as encouraging as anyone could ever be of their little sister. My parents have been so proud of the work that I have been able to do in such a short year. You all have only encouraged my dreams to grow. Whatever words of thanks that I can think of putting here can never adequately express the amount of gratitude that I feel for the immeasurable support that I have always received from the four of you.

This work has thus been made possible by an amalgamation of writings that I have read, research that I have done, and people that have guided me along the way. I thank them all. Needless to say, any errors in translation or analysis remain mine alone.
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PROLOGUE

Saturday October 17, 1970

18:18h – Pierre Laporte is assassinated by the Chenier cell of the *Front de libération du Québec* (FLQ).

19:00h – An anonymous caller phones Montréal’s CKAC radio station, but is ignored.

After a third call, a reporter finally follows instructions to retrieve a note at a nearby theatre. It states:

Pierre Laporte, Minister of Unemployment and Assimilation, was executed at 6:18 tonight. … You will find the body in the trunk of the green Chevrolet (9J-2420) at the St. Hubert Base. We shall overcome.

– FLQ

The reporter goes on his own to find the car, but it is locked.

Sunday October 18

00:20h – The police arrive to open the trunk and, as advised, they find Laporte’s body.

Wednesday October 21

The first of three autopsy reports is released. They will all insist that Laporte was “choked to death with the chain of a religious medal he wore around his neck.”¹

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¹ Eleanor S. Wainstein, “The Cross and Laporte Kidnappings, Montreal, October 1970,” *A Report prepared for the Department of State and Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency* (RAND, 1977), 21-23 (my emphasis). Although this is the standard account, there remain conflicting stories surrounding the death of Laporte. Photographs exist of the St. Christophe medal worn at the time of his death (for example, see photo in Pierre Vallières, *The Assassination of Pierre Laporte: Behind the October ’70 Scenario* (Toronto: James Lorimer, 1977), 82) but some authors resolutely insist that the chain had a crucifix attached (see Peggy Curran, “Laporte death quick, says killer turned author,” *The Gazette* (Montréal) November 19, 1982; Samuel W. Corrigan, “Sweet’s Canadian Anthropology” *American Anthropologist* 80, no. 2 (June 1978): 373). Such accounts push the “religious rupture” aspect of the FLQ narrative further by insisting on a clean break with religion through such a direct act. Regardless of its veracity, this narrative of the assassination that deems Laporte strangled with some sort of religious medal remains significant. (For examples of this story, see James Stewart, *Seven Years of Terrorism: The FLQ*. 1970, 6; Fonds Comité d’Aide au Groupe “Vallières et Gagnon”, Box 1, file “Seven Years of Terrorism,” Montreal Star special publication, William Ready Division of Archives and Research Collections, McMaster University Library; Paul Waters, “Autopsy report shows Laporte was strangled,” *The Gazette* Thursday October 22 1970; “Chain Holding Medal Used to Kill Laporte,” *The Hartford Courant*, October 22 1970; Eugene Griffin, “Neck Chain is Weapon in Laporte Strangling,” *Chicago Tribune* October 22 1970).
I am a Roman Catholic. I was baptized, had my First Communion, and was confirmed in the same Stoney Creek church. Although my mother was an active participant in the United Church growing up, she converted to Catholicism upon marrying into my father’s Italian family. For both of my parents, it was important for my brothers and me to be educated in Catholic schools. Just like my brothers, I went to St. Francis Xavier elementary school. Some years later and a few blocks down the road, I spent my high school years at Cardinal Newman. At both places, I was fortunate to have teachers who were ecumenical enough to converse about all sorts of religions with integrity and respect. It was the conversations that took place here that gave me a taste for Catholic theology. Such open discussion about the faith thus entrenched a uniquely Catholic sensibility in me that was consolidated by the secular household in which I was raised. No teacher, textbook, or classmate, however, could convince me that much value resided in either the physical Church or the political institution of the Vatican.

Actual Church attendance has never been fundamental to the faith that I practise. Observing my religion in this way, I was more exception than rule in my Roman Catholic Italian neighbourhood. Most of my friends were avid Church-goers. Apart from my brother, who has always been the most committed Catholic of the family, the rest of us

_of Pierre Laporte_, however, Vallières quite plausibly insists that such a strangling death was impossible. He cites _Felquipe_ defence counsel Robert Lemieux’s reasoning that the chain was too flimsy to serve as a murder weapon (135). Vallières substantiates such opinions by citing the scientific tests performed at the University of Montreal, which suggest that the chain could only withstand fourteen pounds of pressure (140). As one of the four men culpable in Laporte’s death, Francis Simard refused to share specific details in his memoir (see Francis Simard, _Talking it Out: The October Crisis from the Inside_ (Montréal: Guernica, 1987). In Jean-Daniel Lafond’s 1994 documentary _La liberté en colère_, Vallières pressures Simard to agree with his understanding of events and the fallibility of the Laporte autopsy reports. Simard remains silent. He refuses to corroborate Vallières’s interpretation. From a historical perspective, whether or not the religious medal that is sometimes remembered as a crucifix was actually involved in the killing is of less significance than the extraordinary symbolic importance attached to it in this story. This narrative has worked to distance the _Felquistes_ from having any attachment to Catholicism.
would try our darnedest to get to mass for Easter and Christmas. The Church was big enough to allow for a number of masses a day. I could get by without being noticed as someone who only went a couple of times a year. I’d smile and nod when my friends derided the people who would only show up on those days, forcing the regular Churchgoers to stand and line the walls instead of sitting in the pews. I was fully aware of my being the very cause of their irritation.

I still participated in mass when I was younger. My bounding voice guaranteed that I was often chosen for school masses to say petitions or Gospel readings. I was a part of our diocese’s youth group the year that Pope John Paul II visited Toronto for World Youth Day, although I was not able to make the trip. Throughout my life, I have been an active lay Catholic who simply does not happen to go to mass every Sunday. Even when I have gone, it has rarely been what most would call a religious experience. My mother still chews gum; we chitchat instead of showing due deference to the priest. I continue to challenge my father to see who can sing hymns the loudest. Even the fact that I brought a stuffed bunny as tall as my seven-year old self to Easter service is still brought up every April like clockwork. As such, Churchgoing has most often been a family outing like any other rather than a time of personal reflection and reverence to the faith.

As a result, being a good Catholic and going to Church have never been synonymous for me. I refuse to give money when the collection plate is passed around due to that very principle. Church is not something to be paid for because an individual’s faith does not depend on the amount of money that he or she can afford to give. It is a personal experience that creates and sustains a community informed by the Catholic ethics of service, solidarity, and kindness. Early on, I observed that too many people went
to Church without abiding by that sort of Christianity. They go to Church weekly, if not
daily, but refuse to follow Catholic mores once they exit the pews. They do not reflect the
values of social justice I learned at school and at home, which have defined my
Catholicism. It is this religious experience that informs the theological direction of my
thesis.

Over the years that I have spent learning about the men who are its subject, I have
deduced that their conception of the faith in Québec parallels my own theological
struggles with Catholicism. Their Québec was one directed by a class that they called the
clerico-bourgeoisie. For them, this class exemplified an inappropriate collusion between
the Church and capitalism in Québec. Many Catholic laypeople and leaders, both in
Québec and elsewhere, subscribed to and practised a socially-aware Catholicism. The
anticlerical arguments and calls for secularization that both the writers of Parti Pris
(Partipristes) and those active in the FLQ (Felquistes) produced nevertheless took aim at
the Québec Catholic Church. This institution encouraged, as they saw it, a Catholicism
that completely contradicted the views of social justice that they thought ought to be
upheld. They sought an independent Québec in order to recreate their nation through
secular and socialist means. Although their tactics differed, these men shared this general
vision of national liberation. They will collectively be called the “liberationists”
throughout this thesis.

2 See Oscar Cole-Arnal, To Set the Captives Free: Liberation Theology in Canada (Toronto: Between the
Lines, 1998). Here, he discusses orders like the Petites Sœurs de l’Assomption, the Petite Sœurs de Jesus,
and the Petit Frères de l’Evangile who were all “defined by the spiritual values of Charles de Foucauld – a
spirituality of identity and living with the discarded of society” (146-147). He also discusses the work of
Bishop Paul-Emile Charbonneau with Capuchin activists (147), Fathers Ugo Benfante and Guy Cousin in
Pointe-Saint-Charles (148), and Benfante and Jesuit Andre Pellerin becoming worker-priests (177). This
sort of Catholic practice was lost neither on Vallières nor Simard, with Vallières discussing his experience
with the Carmelite worker-nuns in 1962 in White Niggers of America (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart,
1974), 182-184 and Simard writing about his admiration for socially aware types of Christianity in Talking
it Out, 83-84.
Compared to my religious education, my lessons in Québécois history growing up were partial and superficial at best. I was taught about basic heroes and martyrs, and even some terrorists and foes. It was not until my third year of university while studying English Canadian anti-Americanism, however, that I learned that there were leftists in Québec during the 1960s dealing with important issues of social justice and inequality. Indeed, there were masses of people in Québec critiquing the daily life of a nation through the dialectics of liberation, development, and democracy. It was during this project that I read André Major’s “Arms in Hand” and Pierre Vallières’s *White Niggers of America*. The next year I would tackle a research paper on 1960s Québec, reading Francis Simard’s *Talking it Out* and Paul Chamberland’s *L’afficheur hurle*. Alongside the writings of Pierre Maheu, the works of these men have collectively challenged the two pictures of Québec that, beforehand, were the only lasting ones of the province’s history that I held onto. Interestingly, both were from the October Crisis of 1970.

The first picture is of Canadian military men in full fatigues and guns at the ready. There is a helicopter behind them and a throng of children in the foreground. This photo remains a visual representation of the attack on civil liberties embodied in the War Measures Act. It was passed in response to the *Felquistes* kidnappings of James Cross and Laporte. It also reveals the genuine fear growing throughout Québec that was sparked by the violent *Felquistes* tactics used between 1963 and 1970.

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3 For a reproduction of this photograph, see Mark Kingwell and Christopher Moore, *Canada: Our Century*, (Toronto: Doubleday Canada, 1999), 370.
I remember this first photograph accurately, but the second has been so powerful for me that it has been altered by my own memory. It is of the rear end of Paul Rose’s car. Rose was one of the four *Felquistes* who, along with Simard, was a part of the cell that killed Laporte. The trunk is open, with a man standing to the left side of the vehicle. There is a spare tire within covered with the corner of a blood-splotched white cloth. In my memory, Laporte’s body is still in there. It is visible. Although perhaps a bit washed out, his face is clear. In my mind’s eye, the focus of the photo is on his neck. It closes up on the religious chain that was said to have killed him. For me, that is the definitive picture of Québec that has overwhelmingly endured. And I have remembered this photograph in a way that reflects the power of a unitary narrative that has related religion and the October Crisis in a particular way. It has linked the FLQ with irreligion.

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4 For a reproduction of this photograph, see *Ibid.*, 371.
For years, these two images encapsulated Québécois politics for me. I imagine many people outside of Québec share similar half-articulated feelings and memories about the times that they represent. The October Crisis has been sold to most Canadians through a historical narrative of fear. It paints many of the men studied here as unequivocal terrorists. Their search for social justice was invalid. Their justifications for liberation were foreign. Their aspirations — say many politicians, historians, and other observers — were more the result of idealistic adolescence than mature political rationality. To their critics, these fanatics attacked the westernized, developed, and Catholic Québécois society that was finally catching up to the other great nations of the world. Although as unreliable as my own ‘memory’ of seeing Laporte’s body in the trunk, the notion that they used a Catholic medallion as a murder weapon fits this dismissive narrative perfectly. The deranged *Felquistes* executed a political figure with a common symbol of Catholic religiosity. A respectable Catholic and Québec politician was killed with a Catholic chain by atheistic and ‘barbaric’ terrorists. Radical leftists and Québec Catholics were characterized as operating within different and opposing universes.
Heathens seeking to disrupt a functioning Catholic social order, the *Felquistes* and, by extension, most revolutionaries of the 1960s, were not legitimate political actors. They have thus become the ‘Other’ in Québec history. They were seen as anti-Catholics in an overwhelmingly Catholic province. Much like their contemporary critics, many historians have seized on the supposedly anti-Catholic tenets of *Partipristes* and *Felquistes* to further demonize them. Such sentiments are rarely fleshed out analytically. They are often implied in narratives about Québec in the 1960s, especially ones that suggest the Quiet Revolution was waged against Catholicism with the *Felquistes* as its foolishly violent fringe.

This thesis contends that this oft-told part of the story is wrong.

The purpose of this thesis is to question both my childhood memory of the October Crisis and the existing literature of *Parti Pris* and the FLQ. It seeks to do so by rethinking the symbolic, religious, and political significance of the thought of the men at its very heart. By using the writings of Chamberland, Major, Maheu, Vallières and Simard, this thesis aims to show that there was much more continuity than rupture in the approach of these men to religion. It will document the extent to which all five were shaped by Catholicism and that, even in those moments when they seem to be renouncing it, they did so in ways that paralleled movements within the Church itself. In revising my own memory of October 1970, I seek to simultaneously challenge the many existing interpretations of the revolutionaries that were at its heart.
INTRODUCTION
Imagining a Revolution, Reimagining Québec

Before the 1960s, Catholicism had been one of the defining characteristics of Québec for centuries. Of course, not everyone in Québec was Catholic and nor was everyone Francophone. But few would deny the power and importance of Catholicism for the majority of Québec’s French-speaking population. When it comes to discussing the revolutionaries of the 1960s, many journalists and historians seem to discount their cultural, social and specifically religious context. The Partipristes and Felquistes at the heart of this thesis whom I call the liberationists grew up in a Québec where Catholic theology and Catholic institutions were powerful influences that shaped their daily lives. They lived adolescence thinking in Catholic terms. When they eventually embraced a politics of liberation, they necessarily wrestled with the political and theological implications of trying to transform a largely Catholic province. They were required to engage with the Catholicism of their milieu as well as with the Catholic ideas that they themselves had absorbed by growing up within it.

Many of them embraced ‘secularism.’ That is defined as a drive to make education and the provision of social services independent of the Church. Many were also ‘anti-clerical.’ As such, they were resistant to the power and privileges of the clergy that set Québec apart from many other North American jurisdictions and European countries like France. In the ‘clerico-nationalist’ Québec that they came to construct in their thought and mobilize against in their practice, they saw a primary obstacle to their

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5 Serge Gagnon, for one, wonders how historians can shun the religious specificities of Québec history. He remarks that “the history of Catholicism should today be a marginal genre in a land once noted for its piety shows all too clearly the process of ‘reification of derealization’ or more simply, the creation of concepts that are out of touch with human life – that ‘anthropology without man’ which has absorbed us in the last few decades.” In Québec and its Historians: The Twentieth Century (Montréal: Harvest House, 1985), 164.
society’s political, economic, and social development in the Church. They wanted the institutional Church’s power reduced. They wanted it to be removed from the realms of political decision-making. Their anticlericalism was not equivalent to anti-Catholicism. Nor was it necessarily anti-religious. It simply condemned undue clerical influence in the political and economic spheres of Québec.

Both *Parti Pris* and the FLQ mobilized the Québécois to push for a secular order. Generally, they did not equate Catholicism with the Church that spoke in its name. In their attempts to distance themselves from a Québec Church that they deemed repressive, they often employed a very Catholic rhetoric of liberation. Shaped by the same Church that structured Québec as a whole, the revolutionaries could not easily discard its influence. Some of them even re-attached themselves to the formal institutions of the Church years later. To depict them as ‘anti-Catholic’ or even consistently ‘anti-Church’ is inaccurate and ahistorical. To know them properly requires a willingness to acknowledge the complexity and paradox within the province’s history. Shaped intimately by Catholic ideas, with many leaving and re-entering the Church throughout their lives, the radicals resisted Catholic authority in the name of ideals that would subsequently animate some of the major thinkers within the Church itself.

The liberationists who are the subject of this study stoutly resisted orthodox Catholic theology during this era. Some were alive to dissident strains of theology in the Church, but few seem to have been tuned in to those writers and activists who were developing liberation theology. Instead, they often characterized the Church as a monolithically ‘Middle Ages’ one, dominating and sustaining a backwards province. They repeatedly understood this sort of orthodox Catholicism as one following a doctrine
of resignation. Throughout this thesis, I will sum up their lone theological depiction of the province as ‘Catholic Québec.’ Even if the Church was in fact no monolith and Québec not universally Catholic, Catholic Québec in the revolutionary imagination epitomized what these men took to be the province’s essence that they wanted to transform. To do so, they often inchoately embraced a range of tenets from the social Catholicisms that were gaining evermore popularity throughout the world. Many of these activists may even be considered prototypical contributors to a radical Catholicism in Québec. This is true even if none of them was concerned enough to extend his thoughts into fully-developed Catholic theological positions of the sort that would later be associated with liberation theology in Latin America.

*Partipristes* and *Felquistes* agreed with each other in that they jointly insisted that the existing popular submission to the conservative authority of the established Church that they challenged represented an obstacle to the politics of liberation in Québec. But they were confronting a Church that was itself undergoing a rapid process of transformation. Some liberationists found themselves sympathizing with Catholic currents. Some were even able to make common cause with Catholic lay movements. Even when they were denouncing religion, liberationists did so with a certain religiosity that suggested their lifelong immersion in a Catholic milieu.

Studying the FLQ in this way seeks to give context to the milieu of which their members were a part. Leftists in Québec during this period undoubtedly produced a proliferation of political organizations. The FLQ was but one of a number of groups informed by the political, social, and religious particularities of Québec. Another prominent example is the theoretical group associated with the journal *Parti Pris*. Created
in October 1963 as a response to the FLQ’s first bomb blasts earlier that year, it was widely influential until it ceased publication in 1968. Concentrated in the university and downtown quarter of Montréal, it boasted 800 subscribers and a circulation of 4000 by the end of its first year. Proclaiming themselves the Intellectual Liberation Front of Québec, Paul Chamberland, André Major, and Pierre Maheu, along with Jean-Marc Piotte and André Brochu, founded the periodical in order to awaken a national consciousness. They hoped that Parti Pris would propel its readers towards participation in the coming Québec revolution.

Both Parti Pris and the FLQ were nationalist organizations. They believed that Québec was a nation that ought to be independent of Canada. Independence was thus the rallying cry for Québécois liberationists both at Parti Pris and the FLQ. Parti Pris specifically enunciated a clear three-point program that visualized secularism and socialism as intertwined objectives in order to reach that goal. Secularism would detach the clergy from the circumstances that Partipristes deemed were keeping the Québécois from becoming an independently developed people, while socialist revolution would give the Québec nation an increasingly egalitarian socio-economic environment in which to flourish. Together, separatism, secularism, and socialism would create a new, liberated Québec. Although the FLQ never had a platform quite as coherent as that of Parti Pris, their manifestoes drew unmistakably from this tripartite vision.

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6 Sean Mills, *The Empire Within: Postcolonial Thought and Political Activism in Sixties Montreal* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2010), 54. In a contemporary issue of *Maintenant*, Guy Robert insists that Parti Pris was “actually the only review that is read and written principally by youth” (59). For the full article, see Guy Robert, “Revues Canadiennes,” *Maintenant* n. 26 (February 1964): 58-60. In this and all future cases, unless otherwise identified, translations from French-language sources are my own.

7 Mills, *The Empire Within*, 51.
Chamberland, Major, Maheu, Vallières, and Simard are at the centre of this thesis. Although other works will be cited, Chamberland, Major, and Maheu’s writings in *Parti Pris*, Vallières’s *White Niggers of America*, and Simard’s *Talking it Out* will be used extensively. These works encapsulate the trajectory of Québécois separatism, secularism, and socialism in this period. As I shall demonstrate, each thinker indeed had his own unique approach to the question of religion. But they also all shared major elements of Catholic social thinking and reached interestingly convergent conclusions.

Apart from their Catholic socialization in Québec, their parallel experiences with the clergy also make these men suitable for comparison. Most often, it was in school that they encountered the clericalism that they would disdain. *Partipristes* like Chamberland, Major, and Maheu were all educated in the *collèges classiques*. These were elite schools run by Roman Catholic clerics. *Felquiste* Vallières attended one as well. Some of them subsequently studied for the priesthood. All of them were taught in schools that they remembered as ones that inculcated in them a religion of passivity and resignation. Such education differed from the civil education received by their English-speaking

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8 Five male writers are the focus of this thesis. Although both *Parti Pris* and the FLQ had women as active members, few women were given a platform to discuss their experiences as women within the greater Québécois liberation milieu in either organization. This is largely because of masculinity’s place in the Canadian, American, and global New Left. For more, see Van Gosse, *Rethinking the New Left: An Interpretative History* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005). Male dominance was often a given in the liberationist movement in Québec. Although women and their issues were sometimes written about in *Parti Pris*, there was not a single well-known female *Partipriste*. See Malcolm Reid, *The Shouting Signpainters: A Literary and Political Account* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Limited, 1972), 94. Through their example of Catholic resignation, it was often the pious mothers of the liberationists who defined the very product of the clericalism against which they were revolting. See Vallières, *White Niggers of America*, 95 for a description of his mother’s faith that is delineated as a form of defeatism. Even within Catholic Action, Michael Gauvreau finds that such piety was a feminized sort of Catholicism that did not conform to the male engagement that their faith directed them towards. See Michael Gauvreau, *The Catholic Origins of Quebec’s Quiet Revolution, 1931-1970* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2005), 60. For those involved in both Catholic Action and the liberation movement, masculine power was informed by an ethic of action that the feminine quality of resignation to existing heavenly and earthly powers did not encourage. Reid, 51.

9 For a unique view on Vallières’s school life, Catholic faith, and revolutionary action, see Constantin Baillargeon, *Pierre Vallières: vu par son «professeur de philosophie»* (Montréal: Médiaspaul, 2002).
counterparts within the province and throughout the country. Although Simard did not get the opportunity to go to such a school, he nevertheless reports comparable adolescent experiences with the faith.\textsuperscript{11} These men may have led different lives to different ends. They nevertheless had comparable encounters within the same religiously-informed social, cultural, and political milieu that compelled and sustained their belief in a separatist, secular, and socialist Québec.

Chamberland, like Major and Maheu, was a founder of Parti Pris. Suffused with Catholic symbols, his poetry was an influential component of Québécois liberation culture. Major’s work in Parti Pris and other magazines often presented a student point of view. His voice agreed with the anticlericalism of Parti Pris even though his writing retains more personalist overtones than that of any other liberationist. Maheu was the most outspoken atheist of the group. His writing and filmmaking tried to find a cultural and political space for non-Catholics in Québec. Vallières wrote a few articles for Parti Pris, but he is most often remembered as a leading socialist intellectual of the 1966 rendition of the FLQ. A labourer, Simard did not share many of the attributes of his fellow liberationists. He was a reader, not an author. But his memoir Talking it Out suggests how thoroughly a non-intellectual like him was immersed in the shared liberationist culture of Québec. All of these men wrote works that illuminated their shared political milieu of Montréal, documenting the central argument of this thesis: even when they were at their most vehemently anti-clerical, they remained remarkably Catholic.

Although participants within a shared political milieu, Parti Pris and the FLQ were at odds with each other over tactics almost as often as they agreed on their greater

\textsuperscript{11} Simard, 81.
shared goals. In particular, Felquistes often condemned Partipristes and other intellectuals as dreamers. In Felisque eyes, the writers of Parti Pris were not doers. The ‘Marx’ of the Partipristes did not follow the actual Karl Marx because they seemed to forget “the inadequacy of mere contemplation – without participation – if one seeks comprehension.” According to Simard, neither an intellectual Felisque like Vallières nor other Partipristes really grasped the dire implications of rising up against the state. “It’s one thing to theorize about repression, the army or the revolution,” he wrote. “It’s another thing to have the cops breathing down your neck. It’s easy to be brave from the neck up. It’s harder down below.” Even Vallières, who was a writer of the journal, characterized the intellectual efforts of Parti Pris as all for naught because of its focus on ideas, not deeds.

Nonsense, the other Partipristes might well have replied: we created the Mouvement de libération populaire (MLP) in order to create an active political movement and put our ideas to work. Responding further to Felisque criticisms, Partipristes would also have underlined the damaging perils of activism without strategy. In their eyes, much FLQ activism exemplified the pitfalls of their sort of adventurism in political action. The October Crisis that surrounded the murder of Laporte was one such example. These debates may have taken place within a shared liberation paradigm, but they were also reflective of the existence of tactical disagreements within that very same separatist, secularist, and socialist strategy.

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13 Simard, 50.
Roughly, these men became anticlerical for similar reasons. At least in part, they had comparable experiences with Catholic Québec while living on the “rough streets of east Montréal.”\textsuperscript{15} Their childhood experiences of the Church and neighbourhood that they grew up in remained powerful memories even after they became adults. As journalist Malcolm Reid put it, exiting the east end did not mean leaving its legacy: they “escaped, perhaps, the slum, but did not escape the parish.”\textsuperscript{16} These men were all raised in Catholic households with Catholic educations in the same profoundly Catholic society. That foundation ultimately fixed their sights on the prospects of a Québec liberation that had similar theoretical roots of social justice to certain early Christian, personalist, and liberation theological interpretations. From Chamberland to Simard, \textit{Partipristes} to \textit{Felquistes}, a path signposted with Catholicism and Catholic social thought can be discerned. A ‘Catholic reading’ of October 1970, grasped as one outcome of a much larger process, can thus clarify some of its still unresolved issues.

This thesis thus seeks to provide a richer cultural context for the violent apex of October 1970 than is often accepted. At its heart, it attempts to see \textit{Feliste} violence as a complex and tragic outcome of a complicated religious and political journey that was undertaken by a large number of young people in Québec. FLQ violence was not an extraordinary aberration. Instead, it was to some extent a socially-cultivated outcome of Catholicism and its role in the province.

By no means was Québécois liberation as the \textit{Partipristes} and \textit{Felquistes} practised it a direct application of Catholic orthodoxy. These men practised a selective

\textsuperscript{15} Mills, \textit{The Empire Within}, 51. Many traced their roots back to Longueuil.
\textsuperscript{16} Reid, 40.
politics, choosing the most accessible and pertinent tenets of Catholicism that would serve the goals for their reimagined and liberated Québec. More often than not, Catholic motifs were put to work in their liberation writings with what seems like little realization. Chamberland’s writings in particular relied heavily on Catholic symbolism. Along with other writers in Parti Pris, he was unable to be understood in a Catholic society without using the common language of Catholicism that had historically bound the nation together. Major, too, challenged Québec Catholicism by discussing the faith. He promoted the necessity of transforming a morality of resignation into an ethic of taking necessary risks towards national progress. Maheu’s debt to Catholic social thought is most directly reflected in his espousal of participatory democracy in the Catholic lay organization, the Mouvement laïque de langue française (MLF). A self-proclaimed atheist, Maheu’s willingness to identify so strongly with the struggles of a Catholic group suggests that the Québec revolutionary left could support Catholic renditions of theology and participation so long as it agreed with their burgeoning anticlerical liberatory ethics.

For their part, the Felquistes railed against clerical economic power. They denounced the Church’s alliance with the state as inappropriate and detrimental to Québec as a whole. Confronting what he termed the ‘clerico-bourgeois’ class, Vallières targeted both the Church and the underlying colonialism to which it contributed. For his part, Simard expressed warm admiration for Christian movements of resistance and the new theologies of liberation while maintaining his own distance from personal Catholic belief systems.
Indeed, Simard can be held up as an archetypical Québécois liberationist. His illustration of the politicization necessary for the Québécois milieu in Catholic terms was put forward with disarming modesty in *Talking it Out*:

There are all kinds of things I’ll never understand because of the limits of my intelligence, and the sheer human limits to all understanding. But to get religious just because of that – no way. It’s fascinating to think about the universe and the cosmos as an infinite thing, it can get you high, but my life gets me higher. The earth, my earth gets me higher. That’s what interests me, the lives of people around me. You have to be acting constantly, searching for life, always in movement. Even if it’s just a half-step, at least you’ve moved, you’re living. It doesn’t matter if the step is a giant one or not. As long as you keep putting one foot in front of the other. You’re not moving forward if you’re on your knees praying. If you walk with your head in the clouds and your face turned toward the Supreme Being or the UFOs, chances are you’re going to get your legs cut out from underneath you. If you walk with your head down for fear of losing your Master Card and your position in society, it’s no better. You’ve got to walk with your eyes wide open, looking straight ahead. You’ll make mistakes, plenty of them, but that’s the only way to learn, whether it’s politics, culture or any field in life.\(^{17}\)

This paragraph sums up much of this thesis. The ideologies, theologies, moralities, and ethics its touches upon are discussed here as the foundational ideas in the writings of Chamberland, Major, Maheu, Vallières, and Simard. Chamberland’s fascination with the language of salvation is here, but so too is a significant theme of Major: the necessity of failure as a moment of liberatory learning. Maheu’s belief in progressive human action stands alongside Vallières’s denunciations of clerico-bourgeois collusion within capitalism. For Simard, all of these themes are profoundly integrated in the revolutionary project. They move Québécois liberation towards an authentic and genuine solidarity. For the liberationist, such would completely transform the Catholic Québec that they opposed.

\(^{17}\) Simard, 82-83.
Philosopher Willard van Orman Quine’s aphorism, “we may kick away our ladder only after we have climbed it,” can be applied to Catholicism in Québec and the rebellion against it.\(^\text{18}\) It helps us to understand the liberationists described here. In his seminal work *Word and Object*, Quine observed that modes of resistance are informed by that which is resisted. These Québec revolutionaries rebelled against Catholicism, to be sure. But in subtle and overt ways, their rebellion was still very Catholic. In enunciating their opposition to an often stereotypically conceived of Catholic Québec, they did so only after they had immersed themselves in its details and taken on much of its worldview. Their rebellion against Catholicism was thus only expressed after they comprehended the very faith that was their target. They had to climb up the ladder of Catholic Québec before they kicked it away in the interests of national liberation.

Like the groups in Yorkville that Stuart Henderson discusses in *Making the Scene: Yorkville and Hip Toronto in the 1960s*, the Québec revolutionaries were working within the structures of their existing society even as they resisted them. Countercultures, Henderson argues, are informed by the limits that the dominant culture sets.\(^\text{19}\) Similarly, Québécois liberationist counterculture was, for all its declarations of total hostility to the Church, informed very much by the Catholicism of the culture that it sought to overthrow. As journalist Ron Graham remarks,


whether from the right or the left, positively or negatively, Québec nationalists owe more to the Church than they usually admit. Where else did their notions of community and idealism come from? What else conditioned their ideas of authority and tradition? Who else preserved the dreams and memories of French Canada for two hundred years?²⁰

The liberationists within Québec society were therefore limited by centuries-old Catholic conventions. Their resistance to Catholic Québec was itself Catholic because the faith maintained its influence both within the Church and in the minds of the revolutionaries. Both sustained and resisted Catholic Québec by their respective operationalization of Catholic terms as integrated in their shared Québec society.

The parallels of Québec liberation and Catholic theology structure the chapter organization of this thesis. Even through their anticlericalism and secularism, these men mobilized the sorts of Catholicism that would help transform power relations in Québec. They were prepared to fight with either the tip of a pen or the barrel of a gun (and, in some cases, both) in order to grasp at the power that had evaded their parents’ generation. Doing so required acting within a Catholic environment on Catholic terms and with Catholic ideas.

The Catholics of the province, especially the personalists at Cité libre and the Dominicans at Maintenant, were cognizant of the rising influence of these new intellectuals of Parti Pris. They were particularly concerned with the journal’s effect on the youth of the province.²¹ From the politically influential Rassemblement pour

²⁰ Ron Graham, “The Very Rich Hours,” in God’s Dominion: A Skeptic’s Quest (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1990), 120.
l’indépendence nationale (RIN) to the more militant FLQ, Partipristes mobilized a generation towards a secular movement that was seen by many observers to threaten the Catholic foundations of Québec. In the ways that they rebelled, and even in their very rebellion, both Partipristes and Felquistes nevertheless reflected the very Catholicity of the nation of which they were a part.

For example, the Church is defined in terms of a ‘community’ in Catholicism. Frequenting mass and participating in the parish to which you belong are the foundations of the communal ethic in Catholic thought. The Church is therefore seen as the source and center of community life. The Marxists of Parti Pris and the FLQ knew that Catholic Québec had developed accordingly over many decades. In Québec, such a Church inculcated habits of deference, passivity, and resignation in order to sustain that community. But these were all attributes that a revolutionary movement such as Québécois liberation was obliged to challenge.

Catholicism and the conditions of ‘community’ were undoubtedly changing. The personalist and politically active Catholic Action movements of the period were in the process of redefining the Catholic community with new terms. These young personalists insisted that each person had cultural and spiritual bonds that linked individuals together. Against the abstract ideal of the liberal individual, they believed that “community as an end served only to expand and fulfill the freedom and potentialities of each person.”

This sort of understanding corresponds to Marx’s ideal of the “realm of freedom” in which every person can develop his or her own individual potential. In a liberated Québec, each person could be his or her free self. This was not a liberal exaltation of the

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23 As explained in Ian McKay, Rebels, Reds, Radicals: Rethinking Canada’s Left History (Toronto: Between the Lines, 2005), 10-12.
individual where each pursued his own possessively individual goals. Rather, it was a personalist and Catholic celebration of the person as a being within an open sort of community that allowed the individual’s creativity and happiness to be unobstructed by the greater social order.

Such a personalist vision demanded a new community ethic in Québec. Many personalists and liberationists demanded decolonization because, under colonialism, Québec’s people were profoundly unfree. To be meaningful, democracy necessarily encompassed “individual and collective sovereignty and social solidarity.” 24 This liberationist and personalist reconceptualization of ‘community’ in Québec could therefore be correlated with national liberation movements that sought the worldwide extension of an environment of freedom. Decolonization was thus simultaneously ‘local’ and ‘global.’ It was definitely alive to the other struggles that were shaking up countries the world over. Yet, in Québec, it preserved its Catholic roots.

As such, personalists in Catholic Action often advanced anticlerical goals that were strikingly similar to those of the liberationists. Agreeing with much of the liberationist platform, they wanted to sustain their own authenticity by distancing themselves from a Québec Church that they saw as ultimately restrictive. Young Catholic Action militants feared that calling themselves Catholic would link them to the traditional Catholicism that stressed outward conformity and Church attendance that both they and the liberationists criticized as falsehoods. 25 For them it was not enough to merely appear Christian. These Catholics wanted more from their faith than the conformity and resignation that they thought the Québec Church offered. Montréal scholar Sherry Simon

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has well described the Catholic Action critique of their religious milieu. They believed that “backwardness [was] no longer a sign of authenticity.”

Personalism was more than a ‘personal’ theological strand of Catholicism, but rather directly applicable to a progressive politics of action for the entire community.

Authenticity of the fashion of Catholic Action differed from the New Leftism of Partipristes and Felquistes. Most liberationists stated outright that adhering to mainstream personalism in itself constituted a withdrawal from a more genuine politics of authenticity regarding liberation. Their conceptions of authenticity thus relied on a direct resistance to the very Catholicism that was upheld by Catholic Action. Both sides could nevertheless agree that maintaining the traditional view of Catholicism in Québec entailed a form of the faith that was inauthentic and inhumane. In so doing, they were both redefining what ‘community’ meant in Québec.

Regarding these new notions of the Québécois community, these groups shared ideas that were malleable and progressive. They both valued political action, mobilizing people for the sorts of change that could get them ever closer to the Québec that they wanted to create. This sort of praxis pitted itself against the passive forms of modernity that they associated with Catholic Québec. The ‘modernity’ in Québec that they resisted can be defined as any sort of worship of bureaucracy, order, and technology that worked to undermine human freedom. In the eyes of both personalists and liberationists, no less than the corporations and the state was the institutional Church prone to regimentation.

27 Ibid.
through bureaucratic frameworks.\textsuperscript{28} These attributes of the Church stood against the communalist ethic gathering strength in Québec, whether through Catholic Action or the liberationists.

Much of the rhetoric against this sort of modernity had its foundations in Jean-Paul Desbiens and his seminal satire on the clerically-directed education system of Québec, \textit{The Impertinences of Brother Anonymous}.\textsuperscript{29} His work was a primary catalyst for the Quiet Revolution and its reforms. With it, this Marist priest criticized the clerical influence on education while advancing the personalist case for a renovated school system. Desbiens criticized the fundamentally \textit{un-Christian} teachers and texts that helped render the population apolitical and apathetic. No less than his more radical contemporaries, Desbiens denounced the forms of resigned and apathetic Catholicism in Québec.\textsuperscript{30} He resisted not Catholicism per se, but its dominant manifestation in Québec. To him, it constituted a resigned brand of the faith whose pervasiveness in Québec explained why “the loss of the sense of liberty is widespread among us.” It was not “Catholic doctrine.”\textsuperscript{31} It was a particularly Québec mode of being Catholic that he censured.

On Desbiens’s reading, the Catholic Québec Church was a modern bureaucracy that normalized a particular order. It impeded free political discussion by insisting on the strict adherence to a certain social and ideological framework. The Church as an


\textsuperscript{29} Criticizing a resigned Catholic mentality and encouraging an active laity are main themes for Jean-Paul Desbiens that both \textit{Parti Pris} and the FLQ adopt. Even the FLQ’s underground magazine \textit{La Cognée} references \textit{The Impertinences of Brother Anonymous}, echoing in its very name the “axe” that Desbiens had urged be put to work in the interests of freeing civil society in Québec. See Jean-Paul Desbiens [Frère Untel], \textit{The Impertinences of Brother Anonymous}, (Montréal: Harvest House, 1963), 23 and 31.

\textsuperscript{30} \textit{Ibid}., 61.

\textsuperscript{31} \textit{Ibid}.
institution thus had the authority to legitimize and delegitimize political strategies and actors. Theological discussions gave Desbiens some choice examples. In Catholic Québec, the laity was not supposed to participate in them. The clergy was exalted as the only group permitted to do so. The liberationist critique of ‘Catholic Québec’ was surprisingly similar. So, too, was their demand for a more participatory society. They warmly agreed with an intuition developed by Desbiens that philosophy is for everybody. You’ll hear the man in the street saying that philosophy is no concern of his. Pardon me, sir, it does concern you. … Philosophy always catches up with men, whether they think about it or not – maybe above all if they don’t think about it. It is everybody’s business and everybody must consider it. They say that it is nothing but a collection of cloudy principles … But some day it will be your mother, your friend, your wife who will be liquidated in the name of some philosophy or other that you have let spread out of control.  

Here, Desbiens speaks to the effects of a form of bureaucratic Catholic modernity that negates criticism, leads to widespread repression, and, in extreme forms, can result in horribly exclusionary and violent societies. The liberationists agreed. Simard, for instance, defines himself as the everyday man to whom Desbiens spoke. Simard saw himself as a labourer struggling with the sorts of philosophy that were said by Catholic Québec to be of no concern to him even though such ideas had a direct impact on his daily life. His more intellectual counterparts put forward similar arguments. They all insisted that a genuine liberation challenged Québec’s passive modernity and was only possible through an open dialogue with all Québécois regardless of their social status or academic capacity.

32 Ibid., 50.
Desbiens shared another trait with his younger liberationist contemporaries: a critique of the ‘clerico-bourgeoisie.’[^33] The clerico-bourgeoisie was a class of Catholic clergy and business people who colluded to advance their own interests to the detriment of the Québécois masses. In some treatments, this compound class could be traced over long decades; in others, its hegemony was a postwar phenomenon that the liberationists had experienced directly. Although the Church had never been as monolithic as it might seem in some of the more aggressive liberationist rhetoric, the new religious pluralism heralded by the Quiet Revolution had plainly made such a supposed monolithism a thing of the past. That it was perceived to still exist as something to be defended against for many liberationists, however, remains of great import.

Catholics like Desbiens, and even atheists like Maheu, nevertheless began to champion a more powerful role for the laity. Simultaneously, they demanded a less domineering one for the clergy. They were hardly ‘anti-Catholic.’ Many of them were simply ‘anticlerical’ in that they resisted the priests who were wielding power outside of what they saw as their proper religious role. This position was amply developed by Vallières in *White Niggers of America* and *Les Héritiers de Papineau*. For liberationists like him, the clerico-bourgeoisie was implicated in a grave abuse of Christianity that had no place in the new Québec that was being refashioned by the revolution.

Clerical predominance of Québec was seen most plainly in the education system. From the liberationist perspective, Québec schools exemplified what Paolo Freire would call, in his seminal *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, the “banking system of education.” This method of teaching is one in which students are expected to memorize their lessons.

rather than critically engage with the material.\textsuperscript{34} It was followed by the Québec clergy in the schools and, from the liberationist perspective, it worked to inculcate colonial subservience. Historian Marcel Trudel’s study for the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism comparing English and French history textbooks was telling in this regard. As his study revealed, the English-language texts sought to give their students a civil education while the French-language texts were revered and memorized as if they were Catholic catechism.\textsuperscript{35} The former required analytical learning, while the latter depended on simple repetition. Liberationists like Maheu strongly agreed with these sorts of critiques on the Québec school system. These assessments were directly related to the more specific objections that the liberationists had on how history was taught in the schools.\textsuperscript{36}

Both Catholic nationalists and Québécois liberationists believed that a nation’s foundations must be built upon a shared historical understanding. These groups collided with each other over the type of history that should be taught and the methods by which it should be communicated. The Catholic nationalists were criticized by the liberationists as a group bent on disseminating an unwarranted esteem for the Church. Even in the early 1980s, political scientist Denis Monière still cautioned that “we must be wary of the bias of certain historians, more Catholic than scientific, who have a tendency to idealize the

\textsuperscript{34} Paulo Freire, \textit{Pedagogy of the Oppressed} (New York: Herder and Herder, 1970), 63.

\textsuperscript{35} Canada. Studies of the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism \textit{Canadian History Textbooks: A Comparative Study}, by Marcel Trudel and Geneviève Jain (Ottawa: Queen’s Printer, 1970), 123.

\textsuperscript{36} Even with the success of secularism in the Québec education system, it is interesting to note how consistently the system has been debated. Sacrifice and redemption are still major historical themes. There remains an emphasis on past failures and the virtue of suffering. For a statistical analysis of upper year high school, CEGEP, and university students regarding knowledge and impression of their Québec’s history, see Jocelyn Létourneau and Sabrina Moisan, “Mémoire et récit de l’aventure historique du Québec chez les jeunes québécois d’héritage canadien-français: coup de sonde, amorce d’analyse des résultats, questionnements,” \textit{Canadian Historical Review} 85 no. 2 (June 2004): 325-356.
French past, holding up the pioneer settlers as models of virtue sprung from Zeus’s brow, pious and respectful of authority." Agreeing with both the Citélibrists and other secular historians in this regard, the liberationists pushed for a new sort of history. They wanted history to be a subject more capable of imparting insight and skills applicable to other facets of life.

In resisting the Church as an institution, both Desbiens and the liberationists drew freely on contemporarily occurring Second Vatican Council debates. Personalism and liberation theology were the two main theological trends of the era. They were the social Catholicisms that were most applicable to a Québec attempting reforms so radical that many thought that they even constituted a revolution of liberationist proportions.

As the name suggests, personalism sought a more personal relationship to the faith. It promoted ideas that pushed its followers towards individualizing their religion in order for it to be relevant and applicable to the circumstances of the given believer at hand. Challenging forms of the faith predicated on ritual, subservience, and resignation, personalism called for a more engaging and active Catholicism.

Liberation theology similarly sought a more humanist Catholicism. Its focus was on the attainment of social justice for all with a preferential option for the poor. As such, it had a particular relationship with struggles against oppression and solidarity. In the mid- to late 1960s, liberation theology was coalescing in Latin America and was still very much in the process of its creation as a Catholic interpretation. The Québécois liberationists of the 1960s can thus be understood as being affected by, at most, prototypes of this paradigm in their theoretical writings. Yet it remains relevant to the

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appreciation of the liberationists’ work because its readings of the situation of Catholics opposed to poverty and oppression were in many respects parallel. Personalism and proto-liberation theology thus spoke to believers looking for more participatory interpretations of Catholicism.

Personalism specifically places importance on the need for Catholic theological and institutional regeneration in order to confront modernity’s dehumanizing realities. Against the traditional Québec Catholic Church that they often critiqued as backwards and dated, personalists insisted that the faith must change with the times. This was the only way that Catholicism could become applicable to the social situation of its followers. As Marxist historian Herbert Aptheker remarked in 1970, it was “becoming increasingly clear to religious people of any sensitivity that persistence in opposing the worldwide demand for an end to hunger, illiteracy, and indignity is suicidal.” A personalist interpretation of the faith thus comprehends Catholicism in an on-the-ground and distinctively evolutionary sense. It is a progressive style of Catholicism that understands the social ramifications of a faith that is still relevant in a modern era. Religious regeneration might well decree a much less authoritarian, doctrinaire, and rigid institution of the Church that could only better enact Catholicism’s basic ethics.

Personalism and liberation theology offered two new options of being modern and Catholic in Québec. In the *Automatiste* manifesto *Refus Global*, artist Paul-Emile Borduas characterized Catholic Québec as a closed door or a hurdle to be passed. He

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39 Aptheker, 20.
spoke of the “shame at our hopeless bondage” of Catholicism.\textsuperscript{40} His decades-old call of resistance from the 1940s now had new supporters. \textit{Parti Pris} and other liberationists sought to generate their own challenge to a clerically-dominated Québec in this vein. They often drew upon examples of decolonization struggles to bolster their case. At times this emphasis lent a superficial anti-Catholic aura to their writings. Echoing Borduas and the \textit{Automatistes}, they sometimes suggested that all things Catholic had precluded the successes of radical humanism. Yet many of the same people developed positions that can only be described as anticipations of liberation theology. Both politics were opposed to the structures that dehumanized the individual. Whether inspired by Borduas or by one of the new interpretations of Catholicism, the liberationists channeled a humanist philosophy by criticizing the capitalist, federalist, and clerical framework of Québec as an integrated and dehumanizing system that must be challenged.

This political and religious order that liberationists wanted to undermine was epitomized for them by Abbé Lionel Groulx. He wrote histories that justified Catholic Québec’s liberating role in North America. As a historian from the Church, Groulx told an influential story of \textit{la survivance}. It insisted that the Québec nation endured primarily because of Church intervention. His “messianic racism,” to cite Chamberland’s unflattering term, invested Québec with a religious mission for salvation that was hardly liberatory to \textit{Partipristes} and \textit{Felquistes}.\textsuperscript{41} Although heavily contested now, his was a popular vision that has become one of the most resilient narratives of Québec.

\textsuperscript{41} Paul Chamberland, “Chronique de l’information: M. Jean-Charles Harvey, un ‘mystique de la race,’ \textit{Parti Pris} 1 v. 6 (March 1964): 57. My translation.
In *Québec and its Historians: The Twentieth Century*, Serge Gagnon critiques Groulx and similar historians for being informed by specific ideologies and agendas.\(^{42}\) In Québec, the most prevalent of these has been Catholicism. Gagnon thus derides Groulx for uncritically forcing Québec heroes and martyrs into a Catholic mould. Such methods, he argues, have been detrimental to the development of authentic historical enquiry. He therefore calls for a more scientific way of doing history. In *Making History in Twentieth-Century Québec*, Ronald Rudin challenges Gagnon’s depiction of Groulx. He insists that Groulx became progressively secular with regards to his historical work.\(^{43}\) Whether one thinks of academic historians such as Gagnon and Rudin, or the more activist-oriented works of the sort of Léandre Bergeron’s *The History of Québec: A Patriote’s Handbook*, twentieth-century Québec historians have continually engaged with Groulx. From him, generations of Québécois learned the clerico-nationalist version of the past that the liberationists would come to resist.

Some of the enduring legacy of Groulx explains the continuing tendency to see the Quiet Revolution in general, and the revolutionaries in particular, as anti-Catholic crusaders. A static conception of the Church and the province submerged in a decades-long ‘*grand noirceur*’ seemingly authorized the labeling of all the forces battling for change as un-, non-, or even anti-Catholic. Journalist Ron Graham’s contemporary insight bears repeating: “Having created the abstract context and the rhetoric of ethnic survival, the Roman Catholic Church left as a legacy the Québec independence

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\(^{42}\) Serge Gagnon, 2.

movement.” These were the well-established Catholic roots to the movements that erupted in the 1960s.

Current historiography depicts this more nuanced relationship between Québec and Catholicism. Michael D. Behiels’s Prelude to Québec’s Quiet Revolution: Liberalism versus Neo-Nationalism, 1945-1960 illustrates the anti-clerical Christianity championed within the liberal pages of Cité libre. This magazine was the predecessor of Parti Pris in terms of anticlericalism, but it located its critique of the conservative clergy within a Catholic framework instead of situating itself implicitly in a place beyond it. In this way, Behiels suggests that Cité libre was an influential medium applying Catholic personalism to Québécois nationalism.

Similarly, E.-Martin Meunier and Jean-Philippe Warren in Sortir de la «Grande Noirceur»: L’horizon «personaliste» de la Révolution tranquille document personalism’s influence on the Quiet Revolution and its effects. They show how both Catholic clergy and laity used a liberated conception of Christianity in order to critique the social institutions around them. Meunier and Warren are adamant that there was a rupture in Québec history with regards to its rendition of Catholicism. The new applications of personalism altered how Québec’s past and present were understood in the 1960s. Yet there was also a continuity entailed in this break because it occurred within a still existing Catholic paradigm. Meunier and Warren thus assert that the Quiet Revolution did not simply turn Québec against the Church. In their suggestive phrase, it was instead a

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44 Graham, 120.
47 Ibid., 166.
“religious exit from religion” that renewed the identity of Québécois Catholics by engaging them in new ways.⁴⁸

Michael Gauvreau’s *The Catholic Origins of Quebec’s Quiet Revolution, 1931-1970* discusses Catholic Action groups in a similar vein.⁴⁹ Like Behiels, Meunier, and Warren before him, Gauvreau shows that Catholicism did not disappear at the onset of the Quiet Revolution. In its search for personalist renewal, Catholicism was actually a major initiator of Quiet Revolution reforms. Together, these academic works insist that Catholicism was not always on the same side as the traditional Québec Church. Catholicism was being used apart from, and often against, the very Church that had instructed generations of Québécois Catholics.

Grasping the relationship between secularism in Québec and global decolonization is also essential to any understanding of *Parti Pris* and the FLQ. Sean Mills’s *The Empire Within: Postcolonial Thought and Political Activism in Sixties Montréal* places *Parti Pris* within the international environment of decolonization. Mills stresses that decolonization’s application in Québec was not welcomed by every Québécois. For example, Jacques Ferron was a nationalist physician revered by both *Partipristes* and *Felquistes* for his work in impoverished areas. Yet even he criticized Chamberland for wrongly applying decolonization theories verbatim to Québec.⁵⁰ *Citélibrist* Pierre Elliott Trudeau also censured Chamberland, refusing to concede that the Québécois situation was a comparably colonial one.⁵¹ Such critics often noted that those

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⁵¹ Mills, *The Empire Within*, 34.
advocating the decolonization thesis were white and well-educated, with no one being especially poor. To Ferron and Trudeau, the Québec society that they lived in was not anywhere near as impoverished or oppressed as the other decolonizing countries of the world.

Mills accurately counters that Partipristes did not see their struggle as one of simple replication, repeating the same theories and practices of global decolonization. The FLQ did apply elements of the organizational structure of Algeria’s *Front de libération nationale* (FLN) and the urban guerrilla warfare tactics of Carlos Marighella as practiced in Uruguay. Both Partipristes and Felquistes saw that their sentiments and experience had the same colonial flavour as other developing nations. But they also viewed the Québec case as unique. Mills cites Chamberland’s rebuke to Ferron and Trudeau as evidence. By applying the decolonization theories to the Québécois situation, Chamberland comments that the Partipristes transformed “the very meaning of the terms ‘colonization’ and ‘decolonization.’” Transposing the terms to Québec entailed their very redefinition. A Felquiste like Simard even insisted that using outside models “was a joke to us. No change ever came from copying other people. Organizational forms have to arise from your own country, and if they don’t, you’ll only be preaching to the converted. Our everyday reality was our guide to structuring our organization.” This speaks to the looseness of a FLQ structure that did not require strict adherence to dogma or practices within its cells. Although the global movement was undoubtedly a source of inspiration and solidarity, the FLQ accessed it selectively. They used, tweaked, and added

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53 Simard, 133.
elements to whatever it borrowed as the Québécois situation required. And it was their unique national experience with Catholicism and the Church that overwhelmingly made their efforts of decolonization distinctly Québécois.

The liberationists conceptualized Québec’s history as one of colonial oppression. Crushed by imperialisms, first under French rule, then the British conquest, and then Canadian Confederation, with its ever-present threats of English-Canadian assimilation and American economic domination, the Québécois had only lived as a colony. What is more, each of these imperialisms had been mediated by the Church. The liberationists were therefore adamant that such was an institution that had supported the colonial mentality. The Catholic Church permitted these other oppressors to exist in the first place.

Although Mills rightly mentions that anticlericalism should not be mistaken for anti-Catholicism on the political left of Québec as a whole, he does not seem to make room for the possibility of Catholic influence on Partipristes (or, for that matter, Felquistes). Additional insight into the intellectual and political currents that he has so acutely analyzed is possible by giving more weight to Catholicism’s role. The liberationists themselves often articulated a perspective that regarded both the Church and Empire to be their principal adversaries. Their very combination of the ideals of decolonization with those of anticlericalism made their revolution a distinctively Catholic one.

Strenuously objecting to both imagined and actual Church domination, the Partipristes subscribed to and at times even made starker the traditional interpretations of

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55 Mills, *The Empire Within*, 52.
Québec that tended to depict its religious nuances in black-and-white terms. Their narrow perspectives on Catholicism sometimes depicted the Church as an institution that was an inherently “conservative, reactionary force.” Sometimes, the Partipristes give the impression that in their imagined future Québec there would be no Catholics at all. But most often, their arguments led to a society in which Catholics and non-Catholics alike were liberated from the confines of their shared social institutions in order to give full expression to the egalitarianism that had been long latent within the faith. And herein lay the subtle Catholicism of much of their thought: they often combined religiosity and anticlericalism in the same breath.

Even though the liberationists themselves may have tried to promote their politicization as a rupture with religion, the foundations of their theories, the trajectory of their writings, and their recorded life stories actually reveal Catholicism to be a chief strand of continuity in their lives. Try as they might, this cohort of radicals was still part of a very Catholic society. Their anticlericalism cannot be equated with the complete abandonment of Catholic morality or theology. For Eric Bédard to state that the “FLQ activists didn’t seem at all influenced by the spirit of social Catholicism or by Personalism. … We are dealing here with people of the Parti Pris generation for whom … the Church played a strictly negative role in Québec, collaborating as it did with the enemy,” suggests that these men were able to ignore a childhood and adolescence

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strongly affected by Catholicism. Although Bédard is correct in highlighting the anticlerical criticisms of Parti Pris and the FLQ, his insistence that “all things religious had been left behind” is ahistorical. On the contrary, the evidence suggests that personalist and proto-liberation theological perspectives allowed Catholicism to have a continuing impact on the liberationists. Whatever their stance on the institutional Church, they held onto the social justice ideas that corresponded to the increasingly popular Catholic theological movements of their time.

With specific regard to works about Parti Pris, there are a number of studies that look at the literary import of the magazine. Finding analyses that place the journal politically and socially within its historical moment is difficult. The Partipristes are most often pushed to footnotes, margins, and small sections of a wider study. Malcolm Reid’s work, The Shouting Signpainters: A Literary and Political Account of Quebec Revolutionary Nationalism, is thus exceptional. His book focuses on the Partipristes themselves. With particular reference to the debates circling the use of the Anglo-influenced French slang of joual, he discusses how these men sought to create a liberated Québec through a combination of literature and political action. He ties their cultural artifacts to the social and political world around them in order to comprehend the Partipriste generation in its entirety.

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58 Ibid., 49.
60 The hostility between Anglophones and Francophones in Québec is surely a focal point in Québécois history. During the 1960s, Partipristes used joual to demonstrate their distinctiveness as a nation. It was the Québécois slang language that was neither English nor French and, as such, was used as a form of resistance. It was thus a major theme of discussion for Partipristes and the debates surrounding them and their politics.
Partipristes sought to change their world by publishing a periodical. They sought to fix their society by writing about its ills and offering solutions. Their journal informed a generation on the ideas of decolonization and liberation. It made a new Québec seem within reach for their audience. In Reid’s interpretation, Parti Pris flouts the Church-backed status quo. It pushed a generation towards participation in its own political action. He substantiates this interpretation through a narrative of interviews and biography in order to situate Parti Pris in its Québécois context.

Perhaps because of terrorism’s violent outcomes and the immense publicity surrounding the October Crisis, Felquiste historiography is more substantial in terms of size than that devoted to Parti Pris. As a result of its presentist preoccupation with terror, however, it is not particularly varied. The question of violence has clouded a concrete understanding of Felquiste intent. Journalist Louis Fournier’s FLQ: The Anatomy of an Underground Movement remains the preeminent study of the group. Although lacking citations, it is the only book that attempts to provide a holistic treatment of the FLQ. Like Reid with Parti Pris, Fournier’s account writes the Felquistes back into their historical moment. He describes their actions while illustrating the time, society, and international movements that affected Québec in the 1960s as the FLQ gained prominence on the political scene.

By comparison, social psychologist Gustave Morf’s Terror in Quebec: Case studies of the FLQ pathologizes its subject. Morf blames Felquiste criminality on their adolescent idealism and Québec’s supposed hedonism. To him, Québec was a “self-indulgent, permissive society which produces a rapidly increasing number of people who

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refuse to grow up and who believe in taking the law into their own hands.”62 In this way, Morf’s depiction of the FLQ parallels the characterizations put forward by its contemporary enemies. Reid remarks that “when the FLQ came in 1963, Cité libre saw only madness.”63 Mason Wade, who wrote an imposing history spanning 1760 to 1967 titled *The French Canadians*, similarly deemed them a “separatist lunatic fringe.”64 These sorts of delineations of the FLQ take them outside of their individual histories and social rearing. It blames *Felquistes* violence on a sort of criminal insanity.

Forensic conclusions such as Morf’s are incomplete. An appropriate history of the FLQ ought to seek to understand what led its members to understand violence as a suitable political tactic in the first place. Doing this requires the historian to understand the adolescent drives to change things that Morf elucidates, sure. Many of these revolutionaries were barely out of their teens. But it also necessitates an understanding of individual, national, and global happenings that prompted not only a single person but a substantial number of politically active youth to think that an armed struggle was even a viable option.

One of the most dramatic of these happenings was the new relationship between Christianity and Marxism. Such was attaining new prominence in the global Church. To most observers in Québec, Christians and Marxists were by definition perpetual enemies. A superficial reading of *Parti Pris* seemingly bears this out. Just as capitalism reduced people to passive objects, so too the Church reduced parishioners to flaccid masses

62 Ibid., Preface.
63 Reid, 25.
awaiting heavenly reward, went their familiar refrain. Thus the Christian/Marxist dichotomy seems to support the view that the revolutionaries of the 1960s were anti-Catholic. What is overlooked in such assessments, however, is the evidence of a substantial Christian-Marxist dialogue occurring in the 1960s that had significant resonance in Québec. Within the Church itself, social Catholicisms corresponded with Marxist humanism in their shared hopes of human liberation.

Liberationists who challenged Québec’s social structures necessarily used Catholic ideas and images in order to be considered acceptable political actors. To a significant degree, being Catholic in Québec was the very identity that allowed one to legitimately partake in the politics of the day. The Quiet Revolution attenuated this reality, but scarcely ended it. Even as Catholicism embraced the new forms of faith that allowed for a more intensely personal identification with religion, it maintained a powerful influence.

Québec as a society was changing. Between the Quiet Revolution and an emergent Catholic pluralism, “the new Québec no longer wanted to define its identity in Catholic terms.” But the Francophone Québec that reared these men had defined itself largely by its language and religion. Its national identity was overwhelmingly a Catholic one. Imagining that the liberationists could summarily dismiss their Catholicism in the interests of their revolution was unrealistic.

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65 Trudel discussed his own politicization in the period immediately preceding the era under study in his memoir which, during the liberationist movement, was in the midst of being changed by the Quiet Revolution’s reforms. He states that “one had to be a practicing Catholic to exist in civil society.” As such, individuals had to assume the identity of Catholic Québec in order to politically participate. Marcel Trudel, Memoirs of a Less Travelled Road: A Historian’s Life (Montréal: Véhicule Press, 2002), 22.

This is not to deny that many liberationists made the attempt to do so. Many indulged in sharply worded and highly cynical dismissals of religion. They indicted what some of them called national and Church-induced traits of pessimism and passivity. The literary outbursts of the men under study here challenged such attributes. But they revealingly express their opposition to these Catholic Québec qualities in very Catholic ways. For example, Vallières questioned the Beatitudes when he wondered that, if the impoverished “would be first in Heaven. … how could you give ‘first’ place to so many people?” In this, he was echoing Jean-Paul Desbiens. In The Impertinences of Brother Anonymous, Desbiens challenged the clerical emphases on the beneficence of poverty by dismissing them as common instances of fetishism. He did so via a personalist reinterpretation of scripture. As suggested by Marxist humanist Marshall Berman – whose writings echo many of the themes also found in liberationist writings – such fetishes “relieve the believer of responsibility for his actions. It is not he who is acting, it is the God (or daemon) who is acting in and through him; he cannot criticize, modify or change the world; he, like the world itself, is merely the vehicle of an alien Will.” Or, as an author in Maintenant argued, clerically-organized Catholicism was opposed by the liberationists because it “alienates man. … More than anything, religion as viewed by youth transforms liberty into prefabricated thoughts, gestures paid in advance.”

Just like capitalism, organized religion as fashioned in Catholic Québec dehumanized the individual by taking away his or her agency, according to the

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67 For a further discussion on cynicism’s role in Québec and its literary relationship to the nation’s history, see Karch and Karch, “Montréal: A Breeding Ground for Cynical Heroes,” 301-308.
68 Vallières, White Niggers of America, 171.
69 Desbiens, 94.
liberationists. Berman remarks that options like those offered by the liberationists of Québec are of great import because they proclaim that “whatever else free action may mean, it certainly entails that the actor must be aware of alternative possibilities; and we should not consider an action legitimately moral if the actor could not even conceive what it might be like to be immoral, where his act involved no element of choice.”72 With such a sentiment, both personalists and Marxists could emphatically agree. Catholicism and capitalism together formed a religion of endurance, which represented the greatest incapacitating factor in Catholic Québec.

To challenge such a faith, the liberationists believed that sheer human will could create an unshackled Québec.73 It could create the liberated nation of their imagination. Marxist humanism put the ideas of class conflict and consciousness to political use in the interests of creating a more human existence for both the individual and his or her community. Each of the men under study here defined their politics within this sphere of Marxism. Few of them would have admitted, at least not in the mid-1960s, that certain elements of Catholicism paralleled the precepts of the very Marxism to which they adhered. For many, this realization came later. Nevertheless, Desbiens discussed friend Michael Golaneck as an example of someone who “has some ideas which he thinks are ‘communist,’ because he knows nothing about Christianity” in The Impertinences of Brother Anonymous.74 Author Michel Bernard similarly wondered, “Am I Marxist in the parti pris sense? Am I a Marxist at all? I consider myself so, but I do not feel that it excludes me from a Christian view either, and I would diverge with [Partipristes] there:

72 Berman, 43.
73 See Jean-Phillipe Warren, Ils voulaient changer le monde: le militantisme marxiste-Léniniste au Québec (Montréal: VLB éditeur, 2007), 47.
74 Desbiens, 15.
they have thrown out the positive values of Christianity along with the alienations.””75 All of the liberationists at play here were, at times almost unwittingly, influenced by a dialogue about modernity that centrally involved Christianity and Marxism.76 Ultimately, the fact remains that Partipristes and other liberationists retained the “positive values” of the Catholic faith. The ones that were applicable to their political aspirations were put to use. In their many demands for social justice, there remained ethical and humanist conceptions of freedom that would have been familiar to many a Catholic personalist.

Contrary to oversimplified accounts, these men had all experienced a measure of economic oppression to which Marxist analyses influenced by Catholic social mores seemed applicable.77 These liberationists grew up in an era when Francophones were ranked twelfth out of fourteen ethnic groups in terms of average income within their own province.78 Many Québécois worked in industries that were operated by non-Québécois capitalists. The Québec that they grew up in could therefore be legitimately defined as an internal colony where certain political and economic power structures negated the subordinate nation’s collective potential.79 Such internal colonialism works with, and benefits from, a cultural division of labour.80 “French on the factory floor, English in the

75 Reid, 169.
76 Aptheker, 7.
77 For example, see Morf, 185. He states that Felquistes were “not the children of misery and abject poverty” and insists that “poverty in itself does not generate crime or violence, nor does it lead to alienation, at least not in a democratic society.” His analysis, however, makes no room for the realities of structural violence that certain forms of economic organization permit and which both Catholicism and Marxism were coming to challenge.
79 For similar theories in an indigenous context, see Andrew P. Hodgkins, “Re-appraising Canada’s Northern ‘Internal Colonies’” The Northern Review 30 (Spring 2009): 179-205.
“boardroom” satisfied this condition in Québec. Such a logic permitted Anglo affluence at the expense of Québécois poverty. The political clout of English Canadian and American businessmen sustained and intensified this inequality.

Trying to alleviate the sorts of conditions that resulted from such a political and economic system, the Partipristes argued for both secularism and socialism. These two hopes were linked in Québec because the nation could neither be secular without being socialist, nor be socialist without being secular. Paradoxical as it might seem, the secularism that liberationists supported as encouraging the dismantling of much of the clerico-bourgeois state could appeal strongly to Catholics in the personalist tradition. No less than Marxists, they also experienced modernity in Québec as a form of alienation. In one of his first articles for Cité libre in 1963, Vallières made this parallel himself by depicting the Frenchman at the forefront of personalism, Emmanuel Mounier, “as the embodiment of this philosophy of action, as called for by Karl Marx.” A few years later, when Vallières and Charles Gagnon were arrested in the United States for FLQ activities, a Christian group from the University of Montreal supported their cause in similar terms. They gave the two men a “declaration of solidarity,” one which indeed could have come from any Marxist group: “We are fighting for the liberation of the workers of Québec, and indeed against all forms of exploitation of man by man; and … we are trying to promote a more just and fraternal society through socialism.” For these young Christians and many others, Québec liberation was Catholic, socialist, and

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82 Lachaine, 256.
83 They were arrested for the manslaughter of Thérèse Fortin while on hunger strike outside of the United Nations in New York.
84 Vallières, White Niggers of America, 70.
secular. They did not compartmentalize these elements of the struggle as separate from one another like *Parti Pris* and the FLQ did on the surface. True, their new language of politics “deconfessionalized the definition of the nation.” Yet many radical Catholic young people understood the coming achievement of this Québec nation to be part and parcel of a Marxist-Catholic project.

*Partipristes* and *Felquistes* were speaking a new language of Québec nationalism that they felt required distancing themselves from the faith. It was one that was predicated on the rejection of a passivity-inducing Catholic orthodoxy. They espoused the creative and progressive possibilities of Marxism that many did not see at the time as having Catholic counterparts. Liberationists rejected what they took to be Catholic Québec’s blind resignation to God’s will. Insisting that they could change history through the exertion of human will-power, they followed Marx’s theories of active history-making. Only at times did they recognize that Catholic personalists also had similar goals for Québec.

Or were the liberationists simply priests in disguise?, asked many critics. Were they not peddling a sort of secular religion in the revolution as a substitute for the waning Catholicism of Québec? Were these supposed anticlericalists not acting as clergymen themselves, with their throngs of conforming followers in tow? Such arguments insist that these men replaced Québec Catholicism with a new faith in international revolution. They further insist that these liberationists were simply transposing the very Catholic

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87 For example, see “Diagnostic en vrac” *Maintenant* n. 23 (November 1963): 340.
authority structure that they critiqued of Québec onto the structure of their own anticipated revolution. Such critics asked, would a Québec remodeled by Partipriests and Frèrequistes really be much freer than one dominated by the Church?

For one, Reid shows how Vallières was condemned by his critics as someone who was “exchanging one mission for another” by leaving the seminary for the revolution in the religious organization of Catholic Québec. Vallières responded directly to such charges: “I have nothing … except this faith in the capacity of men to create a world more human than the present one. My faith is not a religion.” Indeed, none of the liberationists themselves ever framed the revolution as a religion. Neither Parti Pris nor the FLQ was a Church. Their respective supporters and sympathizers were united with them in solidarity, not subservience. Simard and the rest of the Chenier cell carried out their actions in a milieu shaped by Parti Pris, the FLQ, and a myriad of other radical organizations. For them, liberation was self-actualization more than it ever entailed deference to a party program. By expressing themselves, individual revolutionaries were acting for each other to further the national cause. No hierarchical power issued the order to kidnap Cross or Laporte. There was no liberationist ‘clergy,’ per se. The seizure of Laporte was a single decision taken by a small individual cell. Such decisions as these were based on a liberatory ethos that saw individual freedom both within and without the revolution as a core value. There was very little of stereotypical Catholic Québec in the authority structure that the revolutionaries constructed for themselves.

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88 Reid, 277.
89 Vallières, White Niggers of America, 280-281.
90 Although some contemporary articles would have readers believe otherwise. For example, see “Diagnostic en vrac,” 340.
91 Simard, 68.
Nonetheless, critics framed the revolutionary position of the liberationists as a new religion. They insisted that it had dogmatic tracts and hierarchical structures of authority just like the Québec Catholicism that the liberationists said they were fighting against. Jean Proulx thus defined socialism à la Parti Pris as totalitarian even though such claims were antithetical to the core Marxism that Parti Pris preached.\(^2\) By listening to voices outside Québec, they were adhering to an “international theology of revolution.”\(^3\) Some thought this supposed exchange of religious for revolutionary dogma said something essential about Quebec itself: “at the heart of the French fact in Canada is the love of liturgy,” wrote one unimpressed scholar in 1966.\(^4\) Others like Bédard have even framed the FLQ’s very existence, in and of itself, as an attempt to live up to an ideal of Christ-like sacrifice. On his reading of the Felquistes, “national liberation would be possible only if Québec’s most courageous sons agreed to sacrifice their lives for the salvation of all.”\(^5\) Moreover, Brian Moore’s *The Revolution Script* is a work of fiction that depicts the Cross abduction. Throughout, Vallières is discussed in religious terms. He is “remembered with the devotion a monk affords a vision of sainthood” by one of the Cross kidnappers.\(^6\) His book was dubbed “their testament, their sword” and, because it was written by his hand, held up as “gospel.”\(^7\) This fictional account was also reiterated in the nonfiction of the day. Nicholas Regush’s biography of Vallières suggests that

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\(^3\) James Stewart, *Seven Years of Terrorism: The FLQ*. 1970, (pg 6) box 1 Comité d’Aide au Groupe “Vallières and Gagnon” FLQ, file “Seven Years of Terrorism (magazine published by Montréal Star outlining history of FLQ),” Front de libération du Québec filings, William Ready Division of Archives and Research Collections, McMaster University Library. For a further comparison of *Cité libre* and *Parti Pris* within this ‘totalitarian’ framework, see Pierre Saucier, “Le socialisme … reformiste ou révolutionnaire?” *Maintenant* n. 35 (November 1964): 349-351.


\(^7\) Moore, 131 and 91.
White Niggers of America “quickly became a bible for revolutionaries in Québec.”

Similarly, Chamberland was called a prophet with a mission in a contemporarily written Master’s thesis. Sherry Simon perceives in Reid’s portrait of Chamberland the image of “a dedicated, priestly figure.” Parti Pris, Reid repeated in 2008, attempted to change the system through “mission and message and prophecy and preaching.” Their supporters sometimes spoke of Felquistes like Simard and the rest of the Chenier cell as martyrs. Graham even goes so far as to depict the October Crisis as reminiscent of a passion play. Such analyses, valuable as they are in reminding us of the hold of Catholicism and the rich ways that the languages of politics and religion can overlap, nonetheless completely overlook the humanist and secular dimensions of the liberationists in Québec.

As the liberationists understood it, the genuine Marxism at the core of their politics was not some sort of dogma. It was “a system of thought, not of memory.” Both Partipristes and Felquistes did everything in their power to stress the importance of a national liberation struggle that sprang from individual thought, experience, and consciousness in a Marxist, ‘scientific,’ and undogmatic way. Much academic and popular literature that argues for a strictly religious reading of these men rides roughshod over the complexity of the beliefs and actions of the liberationists who are their subject.

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99 Bouchard, 12-14.
100 See Sherry Simon’s discussion on Malcolm Reid and The Shouting Signpainters in Simon, 33.
102 Moore, 257
103 Graham, 120-121. He emphasizes that the FLQ kidnapped someone named “Cross,” killed Laporte (taken as a reference to “I am the door,’ Jesus said”), and had two abductors named Rose, the symbol of resurrection and redemption in Catholicism.
104 Aptheker, 163.
Attempts to make *Partipristes* and *Felquistes* religious cultists or secular prophets may be useful in reminding us of the seeming omnipresence in Québec of Catholicism. Yet they oversimplify their politics. Such arguments omit the evidence that also ties these radicals to the much more mainstream currents of separatism, secularism, and socialism. Liberationist secularism was of a piece with the Québec in which deconfessionalization had attained mass momentum. It did not force the liberationists to use only the Catholic terms that they had internalized since childhood, but neither did it necessarily turn off faithful Catholics who were looking for a dynamic and reformed Church that Catholic Québec was seemingly unable to generate.\(^{105}\) Whether obvious or obscure, the very Catholic ideas that *Parti Pris* and the FLQ had at their core were combined with Marxist ones in order to permit liberationists to speak a language of politics that connected with the Francophone Québécois masses. They were not nearly as isolated from mainstream opinion as subsequent representations of them would have us believe.

Their focus on solidarity instead of questions of authority and leadership thus distanced the liberationists from the clerical parallels that their critics were eager to foist upon them. To be sure, such ‘solidarity’ may feel religious at times. Marxist Herbert Aptheker remarks that “the most beautiful emotion we can experience … is the sense of human solidarity, of selflessness through which the self is found. It is the feeling you have in combat … that cements you with those struggling with you; … If this is religious, so be it.”\(^{106}\) Note that this ‘religious’ feeling of solidarity is not rendered here into a dogma. Instead, liberationism was ‘religious’ in the most progressive senses of social justice. Religion or something nearing religious fervour like the Québécois revolution

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\(^{105}\) Reid cites a contrary opinion from Raoul Roy. See Reid, 198.

\(^{106}\) Aptheker, 63-64.
ought not to incapacitate the individual, the liberationists insisted. Faith in revolutionary ideals such as the ones espoused by both Catholic personalists and Québécois liberationists were simply about applying Christianity at its most human level. It promised to empower the individual who was now, in the liberationist fervour of Québec, capable of active participation in the political, economic, and social struggles that affected their daily lives.

In Parti Pris as in the FLQ, the solidarity that liberationists sought to create was possible because throngs of Québécois existed who agreed with their diagnosis of Québec society. They shared a Christian Marxist perspective that viewed the orthodox Catholic notion of meekly accepting God’s will as a recipe for disempowerment. The masses did not necessarily support all of the liberationists’ somewhat tentative remedies. Many could readily support the drive to laicize education while the same people disagreed with the Felquistes recourse to violence. The October Crisis of 1970 thus saw the death of not only Laporte. Almost immediately, the power of the Felquistes message declined in Québec. Both Partipristes and Felquistes articulated a foundational liberatory belief in solidarity to overcome the policies and systems that left the Québécois behind within their own nation. It was their diagnosis of that focal reality that garnered support for a new Québec. That was what made national liberation feel like a possible aspiration.

The Québec these men aspired to create was therefore informed by the precepts of a liberatory Catholicism and a humanist Marxism. They dreamed of community, a Québécois nation, and a fairer life than the one that they had experienced growing up. Many of the liberationists had aspirations that drew upon longstanding Catholic and
national ideals. Liberationist goals sometimes seemed Marxist when they evoked hopes of a scientific revolution. But they just as often appeared to be Catholic. The new accents of personalist Catholicism were becoming ever more prominent. They can be detected in all of these men’s works. Many of their ideas were put in religious forms that evoked Catholic ideals of social justice and community. A proper appreciation of these radicals therefore means remembering their Catholicism as well as their Marxism.
CHAPTER ONE
Catholic Symbolism in the Literature of Paul Chamberland

As a co-founder of Parti Pris, Paul Chamberland became one of the major cultural activists of the period. A consistent writer of both poetry and essays, he was one of the journal’s main editors. His work often linked the Québécois nation to global decolonization. Chamberland’s writing was particularly focused on this theme. To this day, he remains a prominent writer in Québec.

Before he attained fame as a literary radical, he studied for the priesthood. With the Church being too focused on a yet-to-come spiritual world to him, he abandoned his vocation and put his efforts elsewhere. As Reid suggests, he sought to focus on the earthly world “in the sense of [Paul] Éluard’s aphorism: ‘There is another world, but it is in this one.’”

He left the seminary, but he did not leave Catholicism behind. Social Catholicisms were implicit in much of his writing. Whether for his own understanding or that of his audience, he often (and at times even apologetically) refers to Catholic themes in his work. Even the commentary on his writings discusses Chamberland and his poetry in biblical terms. His blunt application of biblical references separates him from the other liberationists of the Partipriste milieu. While they were using parallel ideologies that had similarities to Catholic theology, Chamberland grounds his work in the Catholic stories that were familiar to his audience. It was a strategy that allowed even

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107 Reid, 98.
108 Ibid., 110.
110 Bouchard, 14.
those initially hesitant to accept liberationism to grasp some of its new concepts of Québec because it used recognizable Catholic terms.

Chamberland and his fellow liberationists perceived the Québec Church to be an institution preoccupied with individual salvation. The archetypal Catholic of Catholic Quebec was a patient believer in God’s providence. He or she was not an impatient activist battling for a better world. The liberationists rejected what they thought were age-old Catholic habits of deference to authority not by reframing what a ‘Catholic’ in Québec was but by being a secularist without any visible claim to the faith.

Contrasting a clerico-nationalist like Groulx with Chamberland in terms of the Catholic theological interpretation of salvation can help us grasp the liberationists’ religious dimension. Denis Monière uses Groulx’s position — “waiting for a saviour,” in his words — as indicative of Catholic Québec’s conservative messianism.111 As constituted by Monière, Groulx’s was a nationalism that was waiting for the right leader whose advent would fall just short of a Second Coming.112 Within such a conservative Catholicism, the Beatitudes played an important role.113 Addressing the marginalized, the Beatitudes are meant to provide hope to people in seemingly unbearable circumstances like illness, poverty, and persecution in the Catholic faith.

The liberationists saw the Beatitudes quite differently. To Chamberland, the Beatitudes provided a pretext for passivity. Not only did the clerico-bourgeoisie use them to persuade the poor to endure their poverty, but they also put them to work to absolve the rich of their Christian responsibilities. Such a use of religiosity was anathema to a radical of Chamberland’s sort. Unlike the thought of a decolonization theorist like Aimé

111 Monière, Ideologies in Quebec, 196-197.
112 Ibid.
113 Ibid., 18. For the Beatitudes, see Matthew V.3-10.
Césaire, who served as one of the liberationists’ key reference points, Chamberland’s version of colonialism never lost its religious dimension.114

For Chamberland, religion was very much a key cause of Québec’s wretched state. It focused attention on heaven, not on earth. It entrenched a clerico-bourgeois class that benefited from the maintenance of colonialism, not its destruction.115 Recognizing the clergy’s stake in colonizing the nation by encouraging this abuse of Catholicism, Chamberland left the Church and co-founded Parti Pris. He believed that he could alter the nation better outside of the Church and its teachings rather than within it.

Yet even outside of the Church, Chamberland still used its symbols in his writing. He asked Parti Pris readers to forgive him a Christian metaphor or two, on the grounds that they made his arguments clearer for the reader. He does this when discussing the relationship of identity between the self and the other as a “passing from Babel to Pentecost.”116 The first reference to Babel symbolizes a lack of understanding. It alludes to the story in Genesis of the Tower of Babel where God imposed multilingualism on a unilingual people, effectively forbidding interaction. Pentecost, on the other hand, tells a story of comprehension. Written in the Acts of the Apostles, the Holy Spirit is said to have influenced the multitudes in order for them to speak in the same language and share the Good News of their Christianity with one another. In the same way, Chamberland insisted that the Québécois as a people could move from mutual misunderstanding to a shared revolutionary future.

114 Kanaté Dahouda, Aimé Césaire, Paul Chamberland et le pays natal (Greensfield Park: Les Éditions Africana, 2011), 90.
Given the resigned social ethic that the liberationists claimed was definitive of Catholic Québec as a whole, a state of Babel may as well have existed. For Chamberland, mass passivity illustrated the powerlessness that Catholicism had entrenched in Québec society. Catholic Québec had become incomprehensible for even the people who lived within it because they could not interact beyond the framework that was laid out by the Church. Taught resignation and passivity by the clergy, the Québécois had been denied the sort of public sphere that could promote some sort of meaningful and forward-looking political action. In this vision, the ‘Intellectual Liberation Front’ championed by Chamberland and his fellow Partipristes could initiate a genuine moment of collective enlightenment. They did not attempt to talk at the masses. They sought means through which the masses themselves could speak, in a newly conceived radical public sphere. Chamberland’s use of Babel and Pentecost as metaphors for political awakening and transformation allowed for a broader comprehension of the Partiprise ethic in Québec. He used familiar Catholic terms that encouraged more people to take active part in their own individual and national politicization.

His use of biblical imagery hardly means that Chamberland acquiesced to Catholic Québec and all of its orthodox teachings. He still insisted that “there are those who are lost on the summits of Sinai.” Those to whom he was referring were the clerical and lay elite who maintained the resigned sort of Catholicism that Parti Pris criticized. Chamberland censured such men. Their Catholicism had become irrelevant to

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117 Desbiens makes a similar argument when discussing the education system, satirically stating that “we have the best system of education in the world. … The proof that all is well lies in the absence of any quarrels over the schools since 1867.” For more on Desbiens and education, see Desbiens, 36.

the Québécois on the ground. A Catholicism focused on Heaven betrayed the Christian vision of a world transformed. It had become a prison.

His critique of Catholic Québec was not only directed against conservative Catholic clergy. It applied just as much to them as to the personalists at *Cité libre*. Personalism without social transformation was useless to the liberationists. With respect to Québec’s problems, Catholic personalism without social activism was no better than its clerical alternative. For Chamberland, *Citélibrists* were “the little men of great Babel.”

However much they advertised that their Catholicism was different, Chamberland insisted that such personalists still championed a religion that was ultimately responsible for Québec’s social ills.

The dispute between *Cité libre* and *Parti Pris* on the capacity of the Catholic faith to transform society is a crucial key to understanding the chasm between the two publications. By adhering to the faith and the still hierarchical institution that was at the root of the Québec that liberationists criticized, *Citélibrists* could only maintain the defective status quo that *Partipristes* condemned. Chamberland used Catholic symbols to communicate the inconsistencies of the Catholicism that mainstream liberals such as the *Citélibrists* applied to Catholic Québec. He and *Parti Pris* felt that they needed to encourage more radical and extra-Catholic solutions than those *Cité libre* was prepared to apply.

*Citélibrists* disparaged *Parti Pris* just as sharply as *Partipristes* derided *Cité libre*. Most often, they singled out Chamberland and other *Partipristes* as idealists. For one writer in *Maintenant* who commented on this bitter debate, the *Citélibrists* had the upper

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hand because their ideas were more realistic than those discussed in Parti Pris. The liberationists were counseled to retreat because their ideas supported an imaginary and impossible revolution.

But Chamberland fought back. It was the Catholic personalists at Cité libre who were actually suffering from idealism. It was they who were waiting for a promised messiah. They, too, were patiently enduring this life for their heavenly reward by using a religion that abided by the gospel of resignation. Chamberland thus inferred that such critics as those found at Cité libre were actually using Babel’s tools in order to confound and halt the advent of Québec’s Pentecostal awakening. One has a sense in reading this debate of previewing many subsequent clashes between personalists and liberationists. These were ones that were to unfold within the Church throughout the world as liberation theology cohered as a theological position.

If Chamberland sometimes employed religious imagery as a way of reaching his audience, he also used it at other times in order to provoke them. Many critics thought he was simply engaged in acts of religious desecration. But what Chamberland was doing was mobilizing the dominant cultural artifacts of Catholic symbolism in order to unsettle the certainties of the faithful and challenge the Church’s preeminence. He called the Bible “the beautiful lie.” He discussed his desire to spit at clergymen who insisted on a strict obedience to the type of resigned Catholicism that benefited their status. Such profanation of the sacred became one of the traits that endeared Chamberland to his followers. It showed that he was willing to confront the forms of Québec Catholicism that

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122 Chamberland, L’inavouable, 75 ; cited in Dahouda, 89. My translation.
123 Chamberland, L’inavouable, 110; cited in Dahouda, 90.
seemed to forbid criticism.\textsuperscript{124} He used the tools of the faith to challenge it, with a contemporary writer going so far as to use the term “liturgical poetry” to describe Chamberland’s work.\textsuperscript{125} Another co-founder of \textit{Parti Pris}, André Brochu even saw a Catholic form in the very production and organization of Chamberland’s work. He combines three of Chamberland’s books, \textit{L’afficheur hurle}, \textit{L’inavouable}, and \textit{Terre Québec}, together as a “triptych.”\textsuperscript{126} A “triptych” has links to early Christian art. It describes three-paneled works that can fold in on each other and which are often put on display as altarpieces in Churches. Such parallels make him seem like the Partipriste who perhaps most closely resembled a Partipriest. Even when profaning the Church and its traditions, he backhandedly testified to its enduring power in Québec.

At the heart of his work, Paul Chamberland challenged Catholicism in ethical terms. He dragged its conservative apologists through the mud in an attempt to question a Catholic morality that sustained social injustice. In a sense, he was engaged in acts of seemingly heretical profanation that remained deeply religious at their core. He used religious imagery to defrock Québec’s power elite and, in so doing, resist Québec’s alienation.

\textsuperscript{124} Dahouda, 89-90.  
\textsuperscript{125} See Bouchard.  
\textsuperscript{126} Dahouda, 11.
CHAPTER TWO
André Major and the Morality of Failure

Another co-founder of Parti Pris, André Major also studied for the priesthood. Hoping to obtain what he termed a “proper education,” he received a scholarship to attend a collège classique. By 17, however, Major was thrown out of the college in his first year for writing about “inflammatory ideas.” As a result, he dubbed himself an atheist.\(^\text{127}\) Eventually finding kindred revolutionaries among the Partipristes, he simultaneously wrote for Liberté and Maintenant. Among other publications, he also came to write for L’Action nationale, a magazine suffused by a Catholic nationalism reminiscent of Groulx. \(^\text{128}\) He has been said to not only have written for the FLQ’s underground paper La Cognée alongside Chamberland, but also to have been an active member of the FLQ.\(^\text{129}\)

Many of his contributions to radical publications discussed art and the theatre. Major’s political writings were very much informed by the Partipriste milieu of which he was a part. As a socialist, he abhorred religions that counseled resignation, particularly “the Catholicism which calls for repressing the urge to claim one’s due, submitting to the given social order.”\(^\text{130}\) Resultantly, many of his criticisms were aimed at the traditional Catholicism of Québec that was seen by the liberationists to be an all-powerful monolith much like capitalism. In an interview with Reid discussing an intended novel after Parti Pris had ceased publication, Major noted that the main character would be “a Christ

\(^{127}\) “Malcolm Reid and Parti Pris,” C’est la vie.

\(^{128}\) Reid, 169.

\(^{129}\) Fournier, 49 and 63. La Cognée, however, was anonymous. Without knowing either Major or Chamberland’s noms de plume, I have yet to find a second source verifying their participation in the FLQ. Neither facts are given proper citation in Fournier’s book. Most nevertheless consider it a reliable source.

\(^{130}\) Reid, 149.
figure returned to earth via Dorval Airport as a beatnik revolutionary hunted by the cops." ¹³¹ He did not think it a Christian novel; it puzzled him that I should say I found it Christian of him to put Christ among the beatniks, against the authorities; he thought it daringly anti-Christian to so bummify the deity. The cops, after all, were Christian, the system was Christian; the back-to-fundamentals myth seemed foreign to his idea of Christianity in a Catholic situation, whereas it seemed to me, in my Protestant world, a cliché of neo-Christian art. ¹³²

As with many of his contemporaries, Major tended to identify Catholicism with the particularly conservative religious milieu in which he had been raised. He conflated the simplistic Catholicism of his youth with Catholicism in general, oversimplifying a heterogeneous realm of belief and practice that is the faith.

As with so many of his liberationist contemporaries, Catholicism meant acquiescence, resignation, and a pious acceptance of the status quo to Major. Catholicism was equivalent to the passivity that he and his Partipriste comrades opposed throughout their tracts as a precondition of colonial oppression. Major urged liberationists to learn from the personalists. He pushed for them to similarly seek authentic ways of resistance even if they were likely to fail in the short term. Such an ethos would inspire some to re-engage with the Church. Major himself would leave Parti Pris in 1965, renouncing his agnosticism and returning to the politically active Catholic laity. ¹³³ He would eventually come to work as a literary critic and radio producer at the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation. ¹³⁴

¹³³ *Ibid.*, 175. His interview on *C’est la vie* in 2008, however, suggests that he has been and remains an ardent atheist. For more information, see “Malcolm Reid and Parti Pris,” *C’est la vie.*
¹³⁴ “Malcolm Reid and Parti Pris,” *C’est la vie.*
Of all the Partipristes under study, his writings and eventual departure from the journal illustrate that he was most clearly engaged with personalist themes. Such a trait illustrated a proximity to the Church that made many of his fellow Partipristes uncomfortable. Unlike most of his liberationist counterparts. Major came to believe that there was indeed value in working towards reform inside of the Church. In this respect, his was a position closer to that of Cité libre than of Parti Pris.\textsuperscript{135}

He also defied Parti Pris convention by using Catholic outfits to publish some of his literary work. While writing for Parti Pris, Major distributed sections of his novel Le Cabochon through Jeunesse étudiante Catholique’s newspaper, Vie étudiante. The paper would cease publication before all of the chapters were published because of a dispute over Marxism similar to the one that would engulf Parti Pris.\textsuperscript{136} What was surprising to the anticlerical milieu within which Major existed was that both author and the publication had imagined that they shared sufficient common ground to make their venture conceivable. Such was new in the post-Quiet Revolution Québec in which they lived.

Theoretically, Major articulated a form of Marxist personalism that drew upon the language of Catholicism. He defied a passive conception of history by replacing it with one concerned about human action and future-oriented goals. This was described in an article that was both titled and ends with the phrase, “\textit{Ainsi soit-il}.”\textsuperscript{137} Using such an expression was indicative of the religious overtones of much Partipriste writing, which paradoxically resisted Catholicism by putting it to use. Translated, “\textit{ainsi soit-il}” can


\textsuperscript{136} Reid, 152. Major leaving Parti Pris is discussed on page 175.

\textsuperscript{137} André Major, “\textit{Ainsi soit-il},” \textit{Parti Pris} 2 n. 5 (January 1965): 13-17.
mean “so let it be” or “Amen.” As the Christian expression that ends prayer, it is often understood to mean “I believe.” In this particular piece, Major declared his belief in taking risks in order to mobilize the present towards the future. Instead of using “Ainsi soit-il” as an example of passive acceptance in spiritual matters, he used it to dramatize individual acts that, in their heroism and courage, might inspire other manifestations of solidarity towards the greater goals of Québécois liberation. Like his comrades, Major used a Catholic phrase to reveal its liberatory potential.

Few liberationists were as focused on the Church as Major. He understood Catholic Québec in what he termed “la morale de l’échec,” the morality of failure. Like other Partipristes, he defined Québec Catholicism as a religion of resignation. Indeed, the faith underwrote Québec’s colonization. For Major, it did so by promoting a fear of failure that created an apolitical and resigned people. Thus colonized, the Québécois lost their moral fiber and their drive for change: “amoralism derives from an equally unjustifiable immoralism.” Major explains that having an indifferent moral structure was as bad as having no moral structure at all. Apathy, indifference, fear, failure: here were the consequences of a Québec Catholicism that was focused solely on the Hereafter. Catholicism revered otherworldliness. It thereby sustained social ills. Here was a religious institution that revered inaction. It generated apathy and political cynicism. It revered a lack of concern with this world, sustaining the existing social ills instead of trying to alleviate them. Liberationists were not against God or the faith. They

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141 Quoted in Regush, 5.
were against an institution that numbed the masses and rendered them powerless to these injustices.

The epitome of this fatalism and much of its staying power could be found in the clerically-directed education system. Such a system was guided by the “banking education” process that Paolo Freire analyzes as a foundational colonizing tool. In such an approach to education, students are merely passive receivers of information. They are supposed to adapt to existing society, not question, analyze, or change it. Moreover, traditional schooling gave intellectual authority to the teacher who, in Québec, happened more often than not to be a cleric. Freire sees a symbiosis between educational passivity and political resignation: fatalism, he writes,

is sometimes interpreted as a docility that is a trait of national character. Fatalism in the guise of docility is the fruit of an historical and sociological situation, not an essential characteristic of a people’s behavior. It almost always is related to the power of destiny or fate or fortune – inevitable forces – or to a distorted view of God. Under the sway of magic and myth, the oppressed … see their suffering, the fruit of exploitation, as the will of God – as if God were the creator of this ‘organized disorder.’

Like Québécois liberationists, Freire noticed that the passivity-inducing implications of the Beatitudes and other parables could be interpreted as recipes for conservatism. Like them, he too saw clerical control of education as a primary obstacle to new ways of grasping the future. Many in Québec, especially in certain Catholic orders, were cognizant of such ill-placed faith and moved away from such systems in the 1960s.

142 Freire, 63.
143 Ibid., 48.
144 Cole-Arnal, 147.
the system basically endured. For liberationists, Québec’s Catholic schools served to perpetuate colonialism.¹⁴⁵

Shrouded in characteristics that had been packaged as the virtues of piety and submission, Major charged that poverty was embedded in the Catholic Québec ethic. Yet new Catholic streams of thought that served as prototypes of liberation theology were starting to take hold. These defined poverty as “an injustice and proof that the regime could not alleviate social inequalities.”¹⁴⁶ They were paralleled by many arguments in Major’s work. Liberationists like Major problematized the Church. They did not simply reject it. Instead, they resisted an institution that they said promoted the inaction that sustained poverty, inequality, and injustice.¹⁴⁷ By and large, liberationists were able to distinguish between those they called the clerico-bourgeoisie who upheld the status quo from the Catholics who shared the same goals of social justice that the liberationists held.

As a sort of “Marxist personalist,” Major was challenged by the Felquiste phenomenon even before the first issue of *Parti Pris*. Responding to the FLQ’s first bomb blasts, the March/April 1963 issue of *Liberté* published an article by Major entitled “Arms in Hand.” Here, he argued for an understanding of the FLQ cognizant of its roots and rationale. He sought to elucidate the motivations behind the group’s violent actions. Perceptively, Major comprehended the FLQ through their political mobilization of hatred:

¹⁴⁷ Their support of fellow *Partipriste* Pierre Vadeboncoeur as a curé of the left is of particular note. See Gérald Godin, “Comme un curé de gauche,” *Parti Pris* 3 n. 7 (February 1966): 55.
Hatred is not evil when it opens the way to man’s freedom. We can conceive of no love which does not have, in its heart of hearts, a fierce hatred of all that diminishes and degrades men. It is because of our love of men that we hate the class that treats men like items in a transaction or cogs in the production process; and it is because of this love that we hate the class that lives off human sweat and despises human beings. … Hate does not create men’s misery; it is, rather, a product of the social structure.¹⁴⁸

Major thus sees the FLQ as a movement towards the humanization of Québec. For him, the FLQ attempted to disrupt the dehumanized social, economic, and political structures of the status quo. These analyses combined Marx and Mounier, socialism and personalism within the liberatory aspirations of Québec.

Liberationist history sought to replace a conservative narrative of *la survivance* with an experiential history of failed attempts and near successes, all of them steps toward the coming moment of liberation. The *Patriote* Rebellion of 1837 was thus given a prominent stage on its pages.¹⁴⁹ Although the *Patriotes* may have failed in their ultimate goal, they nevertheless tried to create a nation. Regardless of their result, their very effort moved liberationist goals forward. History was thus repackaged as a collection of failures that were progressively building towards an ultimate liberatory success. Rather than simply abandoning the morality of failure, liberationists sought to reframe it. With reference to some *Felquistes* who had been arrested and detained, Pierre Maheu remarked in the same vein that “it is in their defeat, in their weakness as much as in their strength, that we recognize them.”¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁸ André Major, “Arms in Hand,” in *Quebec States her Case: Speeches and Articles from Quebec in the Years of Unrest*, edited by Frank Scott and Michael Oliver (Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1968), 75.

¹⁴⁹ For instance, see Fournier, 23. Fournier also discusses how the *Patriotes* were discussed at *Felisque* training classes (25). He notes that the FLQ at one point even adopted the green, white, and red flag of the *Patriotes* (47).

Flowing from Major’s morality of failure was also a vision of praxis. It permeated the pages of *Parti Pris*. It pushed the liberationists towards doing something in order to rectify a colonial condition that they saw as one which valued doing nothing. *Partipriste* Laurent Girouard told Malcolm Reid that

‘we can fight the alienation, write works that really do reflect us, even if they are for the moment doomed, and while awaiting the coming into being of possibilities for the work that will not be doomed, try to extract from writing its value as work, as a spark that may indicate future surpassing of the failed effort.’

Major’s insights were therefore expanded into a more all-encompassing strategy of liberation. *Parti Pris* was living proof that resistance was possible. It sought to initiate a dialogue with Québécois nationalists in order to push liberation into a reality.

Breaking with a fear of making mistakes that Catholic Québec entrenched, *Partipristes* refused to shy away from getting something wrong. Instead, they wrote from their own experience in an attempt to resonate with the greater Québécois community. They did so in the hopes of getting liberation right. The very creation of *Parti Pris* was meant to challenge the lack of intellectual freedom that the liberationists perceived shut them out in Québec.

This effort humanized political participation by discussing failures and mistakes as efforts to be learned from and not feared. Moreover, they were to be lessons that can ultimately lead to greater success. Such politics unfortunately extended to *Felquistie* violence. Behiels states that the FLQ acted in the way that it did in order to deploy “a new form of humanism.”

He goes further, insisting that “conquering one’s fears and resorting to violence to follow the course of revolutionary logic were made necessary by

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151 Reid, 54-55.
152 Behiels, 52.
love for a group of men and women so alienated that they had come to mistake their material and political inferiority for moral superiority.” Violence as a cure for alienation and passivity beckoned to some Felquistes. Violence became the only way that they felt that they could open up the political space necessary to take control of their own lives. Long before October, and even before Parti Pris, Major’s “Arms in Hand” had explained how the morality of failure might fit into this sort of logic:

We reject a faltering vision of the world, which thinly disguises complicity with the oppressors, an ideology of compromise, of agreements and understandings, of resignation, of inwardness can only help to maintain the Established Order. The fact that this ideology is preached by Christians fails to move us. He thus challenged the Christian ethic found in Catholic Québec’s morality of failure as something that simply sustained what already existed. And what already existed were the all-too-prevalent realities of resignation, exclusion, and poverty.

Major thus framed both Parti Pris and the FLQ as reactions against the same dehumanization that Catholic personalism disparaged. His refusal to accept a conventional morality of failure — and his drive to substitute a new ethics that exalted the partial if sometimes defeated attempts at human self-actualization — echoed some of the actions carried out by the FLQ. It was also relevant to the intellectual wing of liberationists of which Parti Pris was an integral part. The FLQ took an extrapolitical and violent strategy as they did not believe Québec offered a space for genuinely liberatory politics, while Parti Pris took up the challenge of constructing intellectual critiques of the power structure. Both tried to create new options outside of those available in order to

153 Ibid.
conceive of their lives differently. Both offered the Québécois an option different from the political system sustained and defended by the institutional Catholic Church.

As Maheu put it early on in *Parti Pris*, we “speak and call for the revolution until finally we speak, we write things that are not quite real, for them to become so.”\(^{155}\) In more orthodox Marxist language, Aptheker insists that “no blow for human freedom is ever wholly lost” because they are continuously built upon, learned from, and progress towards greater goals.\(^{156}\) André Major’s outlook was similar. Even in their failures, the liberationists saw successes. Each moment had willfully broken with Québec’s tradition of passivity. Each such attempt pushed history forward. Every effort promoted a progressive dialectic. Each and every one contributed to the process of getting closer to achieving the ultimate goal of the revolution – a liberated Québec.

\(^{155}\) Maheu, “Chronique d’une revolution 2: Que faire?” 44. My translation.

\(^{156}\) Aptheker, 124.
CHAPTER THREE
Pierre Maheu on Making History with the MLF

Another co-founder of Parti Pris, Pierre Maheu was the unabashed atheist of the journal. On the surface, his secularism thus seems the most indisputable. Throughout the pages of Parti Pris, however, he overwhelmingly supported a politically active Catholic laity more than any other Partiprisme with his coverage and encouragement of the Mouvement laïque de langue française (MLF) in its efforts towards educational reform. This group “wanted obligatory civil marriage, non-denominational schools, hospitals and orphanages run and staffed by laypeople instead of members of religious orders – in other words, the entire laicization of society.”\(^{157}\) Marcel Trudel was the president of the Québec City chapter at its most influential. Other leading Québécois were supporters of the MLF, including Desbiens and writer Jacques Godbout. The MLF was not trying to run the brothers and nuns out of schools.\(^{158}\) Rather, the organization sought a more inclusive civil system for the province with a particular focus on education in order to open up Québec society to non-Catholics. Maheu, who followed up his work at Parti Pris with a filmmaking career at the Office national du film du Canada until his death in 1979, saw the MLF as participatory democracy in action. For him, it was a model of Québec’s national future.

An amalgamation of concerned parents, teachers, students, and politicians focused on education, the MLF argued that Québec’s inferiority was exemplified by what it saw as its backward educational institutions. It initially drew rebukes from Maheu, especially insofar as it countenanced denominationally-divided schools that he paralleled with the

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\(^{157}\) Trudel, Memoirs of a Less Travelled Road, 197.

\(^{158}\) Rudin, 141.
racial segregation existing in the American South. Maheu believed that allowing religious and linguistic differences to define distinct school boards could produce a not dissimilar form of racial segregation. He warmed up to the MLF once it came to champion a single school system for all children. The organization found increasing support throughout the pages of Parti Pris. For Maheu, it seemed to be precisely the kind of democratic movement that the liberationists had been calling for. As Maheu said of the MLF and its new direction, “il était temps.” Surely, it was time for the Québécois to create the Québec that they had imagined. It was time to make their own history. Promoting the MLF, Maheu insisted that such capacities could only become realities if the education system were reformed.

Unlike many of his liberationist comrades, Maheu perceptively grasped that Parti Pris was leading a movement that operated within the Catholic Québec culture through its very deviance. Liberationists used Catholic ideas learned from the Québec Church in order to defend themselves against it. Chamberland’s religious symbolism, Major’s Marxist personalism, and Maheu’s crusade for secular education all fit this pattern. But it was Maheu who understood it with the most direct insight. As he observed, the Québécois “collective reality is still fundamentally religious, therefore God is real, and our believing in Him or not does not alter the case.” Like it or not, these liberationists existed in a Québec that remained a predominantly Catholic society. That fact shaped the trajectory of Québécois lives regardless of the specifics of personal Catholic belief.

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161 Here I have been influenced by Stuart Henderson’s discussion of the concept of a counterculture. See Henderson, 5.
Maheu explained, “when I say French Canada is clerical, I do not only mean that the clergy has acquired important powers: I mean that everything is marked. All of our reflexes, our habits, our ideas and our values, the entire social organization: the Québécois culture is a clerical culture.”¹⁶³ For Maheu, resistance was destined to fail if it did not first acknowledge the realities of the society that it was rebelling within and against.

Paradoxical as it may seem, the Partipriste who was most flagrantly ‘anti-religious’ was also the most respectful in perceiving that Catholicism actually remained a living force in Québec. Maheu can be contrasted with Vallières in this regard. At least in his early writings, Vallières tended to homogenize the Catholicism that made the Québécois “equal in guilt, in shame, in the constant impression that we were defeated and in the feeling, which still runs very deep in Québec, that when all is said and done, life is not worth living.”¹⁶⁴ For Maheu, the MLF disrupted this supposedly negative equality. Through the MLF, Catholicism itself was directed towards a democratic liberation. It was based on active participation. Maheu’s coverage of the MLF was a particularly practical application of social Catholicism’s position within the anticlerical milieu of Parti Pris and the FLQ. The MLF’s program promoted secular yet very Catholic values. It mobilized people to challenge an institution that supported and maintained the culture of apathy that they resisted. Maheu’s articles show that he was pleased with the possibilities that the new social Catholicisms had revealed. For him, the MLF was a great example that refuted any sense that to be Québécois was to be quiescent.

¹⁶⁴ Vallières, White Niggers of America, 170-171.
Specifically, education was challenged on a number of fronts during the Quiet Revolution. Bill 60 and the Parent Report were but two examples of the sort of governmental reform that the MLF mobilization helped promote. Both sought to liberalize the school system with regards to language and religion in an effort to modernize Québécois schooling. Within the new state educational system that these reforms inaugurated, Gauvreau suggests that Catholicism no longer held its traditional place in public life and social cohesion. The new educational order permitted the ideologies of Marxism, social democracy, and secularism that Maheu and the other liberationists promoted to gain influence in Québec.\footnote{Gauvreau, \textit{The Catholic Origins of Quebec’s Quiet Revolution}, 247.} Such realities hardly meant that Catholicism disappeared. As Gauvreau remarks, these reforms “marked not a retreat of religion, but a significant amplification of Catholicism’s presence in Québec society.”\footnote{Ibid., 250.}

The teaching of history was one significant battleground in the remaking of Québec education. The accepted history texts used in Québec privileged the Church’s stature. All French-language texts were published by church-owned houses and printers before 1960.\footnote{Sheilagh Hodgins Milner and Henry Milner, \textit{The Decolonization of Quebec: An Analysis of Left-Wing Nationalism} (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1973), 233.} Although the Quiet Revolution’s reforms changed that, such books were still being used throughout the subsequent decade. In his Biculturalism and Bilingualism report on Canadian history textbooks, Trudel further explained that

\begin{quote}
not one of those whose works we have studied is a professional historian and not one has had a university education in history. They have undertaken the writing of [a] textbook because they have been told to (which happens frequently in religious communities engaged in the book business) or because they have taken fancy to the idea.\footnote{Canada, Studies of the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism. \textit{Canadian History Textbooks: A Comparative Study}, by Marcel Trudel and Geneviève Jain. (Ottawa: Queen’s Printer, 1970), 131.}
\end{quote}
According to him, such texts emphasized moral over civil education to the benefit of the Québec Church and the detriment of the development of Québec’s population. This was the sentiment that both liberationists like Maheu and the Catholic laity in the MLF acted on when challenging the clerical leadership within the school system.

Maheu, the MLF, and other critics of Québec’s education system saw in such texts the manifestations of the morality of failure that Major sought to transform. As they insisted, it was in such a system as this that students were taught how to adapt to a pre-existing Catholic social order. They were neither directed nor encouraged to change it. Maheu remembered vividly his own youthful encounters with the system. His education was “based on dogma. And later, we learned as citizens ought to: obey religious authorities, and the civil authorities that God delegated powers. Do not question the established order.” Students were simply taught how to abide by the rules that sustained the status quo, not to contest or even understand them.

For liberationists and some MLF activists, complete secularization was thus the only viable solution because the Catholic organization of the schools was obsolete. In Québec flourished “the old tradition that a cleric was entitled to teach merely by virtue of his cloth, without further academic qualifications.” Such an arrangement ensured that religious orthodoxy of the Catholic Québec variety was implied in every subject of

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169 Ibid., 8.
171 By and large, this sentiment was held by Parti Pris and the FLQ. It was not, however, ascribed to throughout Québec. Catholic Action groups, the Catholic personalists at Cité libre, and other Catholic clerical orders were not always a part of nor supportive of the authority that was given to Catholicism in Québec with regards to political and economic power. There were many who adamantly resisted it. For examples of Catholicism being thus interpreted, see Michael Gauvreau, “From Rechristianization to Contestation: Catholic Values and Quebec Society, 1931-1970,” Church History 69 no. 4 (December 2000): 803-833; Pierre Elliot Trudeau, “Some Obstacles to Democracy in Quebec,” The Canadian Journal of Economics and Political Science 24 no. 3 (August 1958): 297-311.
172 Wade, 1118.
The personalist Citélibrists consistently denounced the school system’s detrimental effects on intellectual growth and economic opportunity. They especially targeted the messianism that governed orthodox interpretations of la survivance.

Similarly, the liberationists questioned the passive acceptance of their taught history by opposing messianism in all areas of life – not just school. The liberationists saw how history was used within Catholic Québec as a way of upholding the clerico-bourgeois status quo. Québec’s history was a memorized and replicated story of biblical dimensions that taught conformity and reverence. It spoke of a single Québec history and a single Catholic Church, both of which were characterized as unchangeable. It was the teaching that solidified what Major would come to call “our monstrous collective mediocrity.” Ultimately it led him to abandon his own Christianity.

Reid notes that the Partipriste relationship with history ought to be discussed by realizing the prevalence and frequency of the joual word, “historisant.” Linguistically, it is based on historiser, a verb rather than a noun. History was thus conceived of as something that could be created in the present. It was no longer accepted as an indisputable story from the past. For Parti Pris, the Québécois were no longer to be the passive recipients of the past histories that Catholic Québec had integrated into a unitary story. For the liberationists, that sort of understanding supported a negative nationalism.

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173 Trudel even goes so far as to state that “even the mathematics teacher had a theology doctorate.” Trudel, Memoirs of a Less Travelled Road, 86.
174 Behiels, xi; Meunier and Warren, 162.
175 Some disagreed, however, insisting that Partipristes were following their own sort of messianism. For example, see Saucier, “Le socialisme … reformiste ou révolutionnaire?” 350. Others even characterized men like Chamberland and Vallières as those very saviours. For such a portrayal of Chamberland, see Bouchard, 12-14; for a similar one of Vallières, see Moore, 13. Moreover, even Bédard states that messianism’s counterpart millennialism was the only sort of Catholicism that could accurately be attributed to the Partipriste generation. For his explanation, see Bédard, “The Intellectual Origins of the October Crisis,” 49.
177 Reid, 38.
that looked backwards in order to preserve the established order. That narrative was not concerned with the future.\textsuperscript{178} The liberationists thus sought to define themselves as activist Québécois instead of being what Chamberland dubbed the “docile actors of a history written in advance.”\textsuperscript{179} They were prepared to operationalize history anew.

Now, the liberationists insisted, was the time for the Québécois to create their own history as a people. They refused any form of messianism by refusing to wait. They pushed the Québécois to fashion their present situation into a new and more promising future. In so doing, both \textit{Parti Pris} and the FLQ followed the personalist philosophy that Maheu applauded in the MLF. As Gauvreau remarks vis-à-vis Mounier, the vocation of commitment could now be lived not by “removing themselves from the world, but by hurling themselves into the human struggle.”\textsuperscript{180} The liberationists sought to inspire the Québécois towards “making their own history rather than suffering it.”\textsuperscript{181}

No longer were the Québécois to accept their circumstances that the existing social structures benevolently offered to them. That sort of Catholic and capitalist conception was blamed on the clerico-bourgeois ethic taught in the school system. As Vallières remembered, education was where “the Church preaches charity and teaches that it is wrong for the oppressed to demand change.”\textsuperscript{182} Or, as Freire remarked,

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\textsuperscript{178} Monière, 227.
\textsuperscript{180} Gauvreau, \textit{The Catholic Origins of Quebec’s Quiet Revolution}, 44.
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true generosity consists precisely in fighting to destroy the causes which
nourish false charity. False charity constrains the fearful and subdued, the
‘rejects of life,’ to extend their trembling hands. True generosity lies in
striving so that these hands – whether of individuals or entire peoples –
need be extended less and less in supplication, so that more and more they
become human hands which work and, working, transform the world.¹⁸³

For the liberationists, the millennialist messianism of Catholic Québec was a barrier to
freedom. Participatory democracy in education would allow it to be overcome.

The MLF’s pursuit of secularization as supported by lay Catholics inspired
Maheu. He outlined an etymology of the word ‘laity’ in order to illustrate the
movement’s democratic essence. “The word laity comes from laos, the people,” he
explained. “This idea ‘the same … for all,’ is thus the foundation of the laity. … As for
me, when I say laity, instead I think of a popular order. And to specify properly, I often
desire to speak instead of the laos-ité.”¹⁸⁴ Maheu the supposed atheist was therefore quite
capable of wholeheartedly supporting a movement of the Catholic laity whose democratic
movement in education was deeply inspirational for him, regardless of its Catholic roots.

A principal focus of Maheu’s writing on the MLF therefore concerned those who
made up its membership. As one writer in Maintenant said of what he called the “Pierre
Maheu generation,” these members took

quite a few ideas to the edge: secular faith, classic humanism linked to the
virtues of a friendly and dynamic capitalism in the Canadian case. For
these youth who have a passionate faith in the lay, scientific, and social
man of tomorrow, … academic debates about the pill and a good portion
of Vatican rhetoric seem like endearing relics of a bygone era.¹⁸⁵

Perhaps because of his MLF involvement, Maheu had a sharper sense of the nuances of
Catholicism in Québec than did many of his comrades. Maheu does not charge

¹⁸³ Freire, 29.
Catholicism as a faith with all of the blame for Québécois apathy. Instead, he was aware that Catholic Québec had been influenced by a particular brand of Catholicism that was against the liberation that he and his comrades sought for their nation. Maheu could appreciate that Catholicism could be something different than the stifling religion of Québec that the liberationists collectively disparaged.

For Maheu and the rest of the liberationists, it was the working class of Québec that was particularly hobbled by the province’s traditions of schooling. As Reid remarks, Maheu and his Partipriste comrades believed that “the schools taught submission because the children would have to submit when they became adults; the children would have to submit because their ancestors had come too late to the capitalist table.” The clerical education system as it stood therefore made class divisions seem divinely preordained. Dominated by the clergy, secondary schooling entrenched this sort of apathetic Christianity within the middle class as well. Instruction involved a clerical authoritarianism that insisted on conformist piety and a religion of prohibitions. Echoing contemporary critiques, it moulded what Gauvreau has described as “an entire generation of passive … individuals oriented to a neurotic pursuit of wealth and self-gratification.” Partipristes thought some of these types of people sustained the status quo of a clerico-bourgeois Québec.

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187 Reid, 35.
188 This was also seen in labour organization. For a further discussion of the fact that “class collaboration was part of the divine order of things,” see Cole-Arnal, 83-84.
189 Gauvreau, The Catholic Origins of Quebec’s Quiet Revolution, 75.
190 Ibid. Trudel, Memoirs of a Less Travelled Road, 151. Trudel was trained and taught in the decades preceding the Quiet Revolution. His experience pushed him to be active in the educational reforms surrounding the MLF throughout the 1960s. The sort of history that Trudel and his counterparts tried to rectify was “la belle histoire, the only one then recognized in French Canada – edifying, revitalizing, exalting, and used basically to ‘form’ the young.”
What the MLF provided was a contemporary example of the history-in-the-making that Maheu and other liberationists could cite as an anticipation of the new Québec. Maheu successfully argued that the Catholic laity was at the forefront of the political sort of history-making that the liberationists desired. With Catholic theology becoming more accessible to the common Québécois, Catholic Action organizations throughout the province took the faith out of the hands of the clergy and their elite counterparts. The common layperson began applying theology to his or her everyday life. Catholic Action sought to reform the Québec Church and what it meant to be a Catholic within it through an active dialogue about the very nature of Catholicism. This opened the door to the kinds of Marxist and Christian dialogue described by Aptheker, who eloquently captured what Marxists might bring to this exchange:

It is to overcome, as Marx said, all of humanity’s limitations, all of its humiliations, all indignities and inadequacies that Marxism exists. No intermediary or intercessor is required; if one were required it would dethrone humanity, demean man, and make impossible his own liberation. Anything other than his own is not liberation but mysticism. His own liberation is desired, by himself and for himself and here on earth. For this God is more than an irrelevancy; He is an obstacle.

Was God such an obstacle? Liberationist answers were not unanimous. As Maheu saw it, his fellow Partipristes seemed more worried about God than the Catholic laity in the MLF. The MLF was working towards modifying the very terms by which Catholicism was understood. Through their politicization, they were making Catholicism about liberation. Just because the MLF had pronounced Catholic ties did not mean that its history-making attempts ought not to be applauded by the liberationists, Maheu insisted. He was not looking for anticlerical or non-Catholic inspiration to support his secularism.

191 Gauvreau, “From Rechristianization to Contestation,” 808.  
192 Meunier and Warren, 108.  
193 Aptheker, 60.
Instead, he simply sought active examples in the past and present, whether local or international, that showed him and his readers the benefits of action and its pivotal importance in individual, social, and global liberation. Maheu said as much: “religion penetrates all life, it is not a theory, but a tradition; there is no distinction between the secular and sacred world.”

He linked this religious “tradition” to clerical collusion with the Québec bourgeoisie. Catholicism defined as such had little to do with salvation. Rather, it was concerned with the authority of a nation and its methods of control. It was effectively distanced from the lives of ordinary Québécois. And still Maheu insists that “clericalism is not the source of these [alienating] structures, it is one of their results.” The clericalism against which the liberationists fought was a certain power structure of which the clergy took full advantage. It was one that Maheu saw had, through the MLF, many rank-and-file Catholics resisting.

The liberation of man was a foundational precept in both Partipriste and Felquiste political theory. Maheu’s focus on the Catholic laity and their efforts towards that liberation through MLF reforms concretely paralleled his comrades’ own liberationist ideas. Drawing on personalism’s stress on dehumanization and liberation theology’s focus on emancipation, the MLF’s Catholic laity was working towards an authentic existence in a very Marxist sense. Reid states that both Maheu’s speeches to the MLF and his articles in Parti Pris were always focused on the same theme: “the God of French Canada was preventing the man of Québec from emerging.”

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195 Ibid., 183. My translation.
196 Reid, 299.
seen as a possibility with or without Catholicism. At the very least, and as seen with the MLF, it could also be feasible through a different interpretation of the faith.

Pierre Maheu and the MLF demanded a space within which one could begin to discuss questions of religion, secularism, and clericalism in Québec. His ‘atheistic’ ideas curiously paralleled those of many personalists, including many progressive Catholics. Personalism “sanctified and encouraged lay Catholics to undertake a reform of social institutions as the only effective means of achieving a humanitarian civilization in which all persons could develop to the full their material and spiritual potential.”197 Another preeminent French personalist, Jacques Maritain, “argued that true Christians had a responsibility to participate in the transformation of the existing social order.”198 Indeed, “Catholics could achieve salvation – perhaps live in sainthood – by participating in the renewal and revitalization of society’s temporal institutions so that these institutions could better serve the communal personalist needs and aspirations of every individual.”199

What made Maheu exceptional in the Partipriste milieu was his emphasis on the humanizing benefits of personalism for believers and non-believers alike in the new Québec that liberation sought to create.

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197 Behiels, 21.
198 Ibid., 77.
199 Ibid.
CHAPTER FOUR
Pierre Vallières and the Preferential Option for the Poor

An intermittent contributor to Parti Pris, Pierre Vallières was a chief player on the separatist scene. His writing career spanned all of the major political journals of the day. He worked with federalist Claude Ryan at Le Devoir, Catholic personalists like Trudeau at Cité libre, and was published in Maintenant. Growing up in the Ville Jacques-Cartier quarter of Longueuil, Vallières deliberately wrote about his own experience in his widely-read and influential autobiography, White Niggers of America. As this thesis has shown, there were many significant liberationist intellectuals. Vallières, however, has come to be regarded as the voice of 1960s Québec.

Before the revolution, Vallières was a seminarian with a bright future in the cloth. In August 1958, a twenty-year-old Vallières entered the Franciscan order. He spent twelve months as a novice and took temporary vows. According to journalist Pierre Berton, Vallières was merely “pretending to study for the priesthood in order to get a subsidy. … He hated the Church for which he was apparently destined. … exploiting his faith because it was a ticket to university.” Similarly, Reid seems to scoff at the possibility of Catholic influence on Vallières. He calls his “spell in the Franciscan monastery” a “relapse into religion.” But later commentary has revealed that Vallières was committed to his Catholicism. Simply, he saw his faith differently than most priests in the traditional Québec Church. At no point was he against Catholicism as a faith. He “wrestled with Husserl, haggled with Heidegger, and ‘read all the great theologians

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<sup>200</sup> Baillargeon, 13.
<sup>202</sup> Reid, 283.
<sup>203</sup> For a discussion on Vallières’s adolescence, faith, and revolution, see Baillargeon.
whom the Church has excommunicated over the last twenty years.”204 He was “deeply enthralled” by Mounier’s thoughts on personalism.205 However observers may have wished the contrary to be the case, Vallières never stopped grappling with how he understood his own personal Catholic faith. By 1962, Vallières left the seminary in order to write for Cité libre. His time here only served to make him even more “aware of my true, of my only vocation: to be Christian.”206 He also collaborated with a number of lay and clerical Québécois, including a particularly significant experience with socially-aware worker-nuns.207 His celebrated status as intellectual co-founder of the 1966 FLQ alongside Charles Gagnon has obscured the genuine tenacity of his Catholic convictions.

Portraying the Québec Church as a tool of the clerico-bourgeois class was one of Vallières’s key analytical objectives. In so doing, he linked the Church with an un-Christian sort of capitalism. Many of his passages discussed capitalist economics in terms of sin. Interestingly enough, such would not look out of place in the liberation theology that would eventually be accepted as valid Catholic doctrine in many circles.208 His companion autobiography to White Niggers of America, Les Héritiers de Papineau: Itinéraire politique d’un ‘nègre blanc’ (1960-1985), discusses the creation of La Pierre Vivante religious community. It shows how firmly Vallières was attached to his faith.209 A fervent supporter of the Parti Québécois (PQ) in his later years, he succumbed to heart failure in 1998.

204 Reid, 282.
205 Lachaine, 247.
206 Vallières’s letter to Constantin Baillargeon, Montréal, 8 March 1962; quoted in Baillargeon, 43-44. My translation.
207 Vallières, White Niggers of America, 183-184.
208 See Cole-Arnal.
Like Maheu, Vallières was convinced that Marxism provided an unrivalled guide to solving Québec’s socio-economic realities. His was emphatically a Marxism predicated on an ideal of human freedom. As such, it was patently linked with personalism. Vallières even remarks that the personalist Mounier had defined “faith as a perspective of values to make concrete analysis and personal choices, that is to say free.”

Personalism gave individuals the power to apply the faith to their own lives as they saw fit. It left ample room for something akin to a scientific understanding of Marxism. The political praxis model that Vallières upheld was similarly scientific in that it was based on a sort of dissensual experimentation.

It was in Mounier that Vallières found a way to reconcile Marxism with Catholicism as an escape from the “empty conformism” of Catholic Québec. His revolutionary politics centred on his personalist reading of both Christianity and Marxism. Although personalism was foundational to the politicization of Vallières, he ultimately found the politics of personalism in Québec uninspiring. His impression of Catholicism during the process of his becoming a Felquist made him challenge the way that personalists engaged with the politics of the day. Although he applauded Mounier, he also criticized him as someone who still “participated in that vast enterprise for hoodwinking the masses which is Catholicism by remaining faithful and publicly defending a religion and ideology which, as he very well knew, served the interests of...

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210 Vallières, Les Héritiers de Papineau, 43-44. My translation.
211 Capaldi, 410.
212 See Aptheker, 163.
213 For a further elaboration on “dissensus” as used here, see Jean Jacques Rancière, “Who is the Subject of the Rights of Man?” The South Atlantic Quarterly 103 no. 2/3 (Spring/Summer 2004): 305.
214 Vallières, Les Héritiers de Papineau, 44. My translation.
capitalism and fascism.”215 This was much the same harsh criticism that the Partipristes hurled at Cité libre.

The relationship of the clerico-bourgeoisie and its influence on Vallières’s adolescent experience shaped how he viewed Catholicism. Berton summarizes Vallières’s childhood as one where he “was raised in poverty … there was no municipal government, they had no water, no sewage disposal, no paved roads … Housewives had to buy their water at five cents a pail from the backs of trucks whose owners enjoyed monopolies purchased from local politicians.”216 He concluded that “it is under conditions such as these that revolutionaries are shaped.”217 Yet as Vallières’s autobiography plainly illustrates, such experiences of poverty were not mechanically reproduced in his mind as the raw materials of radicalism. Rather, they were grasped and interpreted by a paradigm that operated within the very Catholic ideas of sin, redemption, brotherhood, and community. It was Vallières’s Catholicism that provided him with a way of understanding his poverty. His Catholicism inspired his fervent opposition to the clerico-bourgeois class that he blamed as the cause of his oppression.

Vallières was far from the only Québécois to experience poverty in this way. As historian Myrna Kostash remarks,

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215 Vallières, White Niggers of America, 156.
216 Berton, 318.
217 Ibid.
doctors working in the ‘inner city’ districts of Montreal in the late Sixties came across alarming rates of malnutrition, physical retardation, bad eyesight and language difficulties in the children. There were no subsidized day-care centres in the city core nor, until the end of the decade, any health clinics. It was by no means uncommon, in the housing in the east end and in the St. Henri districts, to have neither bath nor shower, to have no hot water nor, in many cases, any running water at all. It was a mean life, this life of the Québécois majority. It was a life doled out on the cheap, cramped by fear and resentment. It was a cheapness and a contraction that generations of priests and paternalistic politicians and vendu intelligentsia had counseled the demoralized masses to accept as their destiny as Québécois.  

Attempts by skeptics to minimize such realities and to present the liberationists as members of a pampered elite are therefore wide off of the mark. They also leave unexplained the very considerable popular appeal of the personalist arguments embedded in the liberationist platform. There was abundant Montréal evidence for the argument that capitalism lessened “the autonomy and value of the person.”

Through this experience and intellectual wrestling, Vallières also engaged with early variants of what would later become liberation theology. Like the other liberationists, his was a theological progression. The personalist sentiments that permitted increasing dialectical space throughout Québec because of the Quiet Revolution provided both liberationists and social Catholics with a chance to develop mutually supportive perspectives on the society around them. These were to be ones which would allow individuals to become “masters of their own destinies.” It is suggestive that this slogan, later to be so important within liberation theology, echoed the “Maîtres chez nous” so intricately identified with Québec’s Quiet Revolution.

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219 A RAND report discussing the October Crisis cited Morf as an authority in this regard. See Wainstein, 168.
From Vallières’s perspective, the goals of genuine liberation could not be reached by waiting for others to make the necessary changes. Nor could they depend on a powerful individual rising up to lead a revolution. For the liberationists, actual liberation could only exist if the entire community set themselves to work. Vallières vehemently refuted messianism. An individual “can acquire true freedom – only by the means of a practical, collective, radical revolution, which no Messiah can bring about for him,” he argued.222 The Québécois ought “not wait for a Messiah to bring us a magical solution to our problems. Let us reflect, let us sharpen our tools, roll up our sleeves and all together set to work! The revolution is our affair … Let us not wait to get started on it until the Pope … gives us the word. The word can come only from us.”223

The FLQ manifestoes, especially the most famous broadcast in the midst of October 1970, similarly maintained that they were neither “messiahs” nor “Robin Hood.”224 Rather, they self-identified as workers united in pursuit of collective liberation. Felquistes did not see themselves above the masses but as an integral part of them. Vallières argued that “separatism was giving an increasing number of Québécois an opportunity to assert themselves, to take sides and to free themselves from the ancestral resignation to so-called historical inevitabilities. Instead of submitting to history, perhaps at last the hour had struck to begin making it ourselves?”225 Both Vallières and Major cite Groulx’s famous saying “our master, the past” as the epitome of a Catholic Québec understanding of history.226

222 Vallières, White Niggers of America, 251.
223 Ibid., 279-280.
225 Vallières, White Niggers of America, 180.
226 Ibid., 201; André Major, “Ainsi soit-il,” 16-17.
survival that continued along the same path of Québécois apathy. But theirs was to be a new story. It would be one of a people free to make history on their own in the interests of an entire nation.

Historicizing the clergy much as Léandre Bergeron does in *The Patriote’s Handbook*, Vallières remarks,

> the English and American financiers, the French-Canadian petty bourgeoisie and the clergy – united by common interests despite their continual wrangling – were asking: ‘What is happening to our people who have always been so peaceful, so industrious, so profoundly religious [read: resigned], so submissive?’ The Catholic Middle Ages and capitalist oppression did not want to die.²²⁷

To be sure, this was a monochrome depiction of Québec history that remains more successful as polemic than analysis. Yet as a polemic, it effectively distilled Vallières’s critique of Catholic Québec as a veritable repository of the ‘Middle Ages.’ Vallières did have a direct personal memory of priests who romanticized poverty and suffering in a way that was grounded in experience more than rhetoric. Discussing the relationship between his parents as an example, he remarked that “only priests imagine that love can adapt itself to misery, to a stupefying daily routine, to crass ignorance of the laws and beauties of sexuality, to Jansenism and the dictatorship of capitalism. Only priests can see a kind of paradise in the proletarian hell; and how useful they are then, without knowing it, to capitalism!”²²⁸ A Catholicism preaching submission was, for Vallières, a root cause and sustainer of both personal and national suffering.

²²⁸ Vallières, *White Niggers of America*, 84.
Vallières took great care to point out that it was not the faith per se that was at fault. He had “nothing against those who believe in God.” Rather, Vallières fought against an orthodoxy that he associated with the Québec Church that minimized the importance of fighting injustice in this world and glorified the future bliss that was said to be attained in the next one. Here was a leading cause, he thought, of political apathy in Québec. Vallières could well imagine a personalist Catholicism that could allow a radical such as himself to grapple with the sorts of contradictions of the faith in Québec. In Catholic Québec, he stressed such an understanding purported that it was as if justice could be on both sides at the same time. To condemn bishops who are politicians and chiefs of state in no way changes the social, or rather anti-social, function of the institution called the Church. And to claim that one belongs to the ‘mystical body’ of the Church does not justify apoliticalism. For apoliticalism is always, always, the politics of the strongest, the fiercest, the politics of the vulture.

For Vallières, a true Christian held political action as a moral imperative. The clerico-bourgeois realities of Catholic Québec that did not were thus immoral in his eyes.

For Vallières, the early Christian Church inspired a radical politic. It was a standing rebuke to the clericalism that existed in his contemporary Québec. He thus spoke of the sort of religion “in the time of Jesus Christ, when the first disciples gave their goods to the poor and Christ himself drove out the exploiters with a whip!” By contrast, Vallières insisted that the contemporary Church was happy to “make large and profitable investments in the great multinational corporations and draw fabulous dividends … which uses charity and ‘eternal salvation’ to suck money from the people every day, with a patience and tenacity of which only these capitalist ‘Churchmen’ are

\[\text{229 Ibid., 157.}\]
\[\text{230 Ibid., 155.}\]
\[\text{231 Ibid., 155-156.}\]
capable.”\textsuperscript{232} For Vallières and his fellow liberationists, the Québec Church was as responsible for Québécois poverty as the economic system itself.\textsuperscript{233} As he remarked, “the teachings of the Church not only justify but tend to reinforce the poverty which is ever-present in Quebec.”\textsuperscript{234} Such sentiments would, in a short time, find fuller development and expansion in liberation theology proper.

Church empathy through alms-giving with the poor meant little for Vallières. From his proto-liberation theological perspective, having compassion for the poor did little to address their suffering. Discussing the Franciscan order to which he had previously belonged, Vallières insisted that the Church often failed because of “its inability to cope in a realistic matter with real life problems of the world.”\textsuperscript{235} If Catholics were unwilling to politically engage themselves with the systems that caused poverty, their faith was insincere. For Vallières and the personalists of the era, it was ultimately inhumane.

Vallières’s comments on religion in \textit{White Niggers of America} seemingly draw upon an absolutism at odds with his later, more nuanced positions. Here he insisted that “the Church as an institution is essentially reactionary (politically, economically, and ideologically) and doesn’t have much to do with the Gospel of Jesus Christ, except, perhaps, for a rhetoric that has no practical meaning.”\textsuperscript{236} Yet he also maintained that “there can be progressive individuals within the Church, just as there are reformists in the capitalist state.”\textsuperscript{237} As one perceptive reviewer noted, the whole of \textit{White Niggers of America}, 174-175. This is discussed further by Hunt, 56.\textsuperscript{232}

\textsuperscript{233} Reid, 98.
\textsuperscript{234} Hunt, 43.
\textsuperscript{235} Ibid., 50.
\textsuperscript{236} Vallières, \textit{White Niggers of America}, 174. Hunt seems to suggest that Vallières did not see working inside of the Church as an option. For further discussion, see Hunt, 43.
\textsuperscript{237} Vallières, \textit{White Niggers of America}, 174.
America gave “the impression that the Church for all its corruption and repression held out in its Christian ideal the hope of a new life, one better than now exists, and that it is in part the breeder of the revolutionary ideal. It is only that the revolutionary means to an ideal were not found in the Church.”

Only after the 1960s revolutionary fervour had subsided could Vallières reach a subtler understanding of Catholicism. He re-entered the Church and sought within it the tools to resist capitalism. The Church was clearly heterogeneous. In reality, it was far from the uniformly medieval and bleakly oppressive institution that Vallières sometimes constructed in his earlier writings. Even in the 1960s, the MLF sought Catholic understandings that differed from the Catholic Québec rendition criticized by the liberationists. Within it were found clergy as well as laypeople.

Even at the height of Felquiste terror, Churchman Maurice Roy remarked that “injustice breeds violence.” In so doing, he effectively highlighted inequality as an important element in Québec’s revolutionary ferment. His diagnosis targeted the social realities of Québec just as the liberationists blamed the Church. Others disagreed, finding the origins of Vallières’s “holy war, a sort of ‘jihad’” in his all-too-ready adoption of

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239 Signs of the diversity of opinion with the Church in Québec at the time of the FLQ crisis were numerous. The Pastoral Council of the Archdiocese of Québec and Matapédia and Mantane Region’s priests supported the message of the FLQ manifesto (Mills, *The Empire Within*, 183). Similarly, Reverend Charles Banville, curé of Ste. Paula Parish in Mantane, presented a manifesto prodding clerical involvement, “explaining that a ‘mass movement’ in the region obliged the priest to abandon our customary indifference” (“Québec Crisis,” box 1, Comité d’Aide au Groupe “Vallières and Gagnon” FLQ, file “Québec Crisis: published by York University,” Front de liberation du Québec fonds, William Ready Division of Archives and Research Collections, McMaster University Library.) Twenty-five parishes united for this Operation Dignity (Ibid). The Conseil des œuvres de Montréal also worked in poor neighbourhoods (Mills, *The Empire Within*, 46.) Evidence of intense Catholic interest in the ideas of the FLQ is extensive and could be studied in a thesis of its own.

Marxist-Leninist precepts. Ultimately, Vallières’s Catholicism was far more an example of, than an exception to, the remarkable and variegated ferment sweeping Québec, including many parts of its dominant Church.

For both social Catholics and Québécois liberationists, the real challenge in Québec was how to overcome the capitalist structures that caused the poverty that they sought to alleviate. They took issue with a Québec society that allowed people to profit from others in order to gain wealth for themselves. Like later liberation theologists, Pierre Vallières viewed poverty as a sin which was made possible by the persistence of the Québec clerico-bourgeois class and their widespread rendition of Catholicism. His focus on poverty was directly linked to his emphasis of Québec Catholicism as a type of capitalism. When Vallières chose to “work for the revolution,” he did so to join “people for whom solidarity has replaced money as the ‘reason for living,’ as the principle [sic] ‘value’ in life.” He chose to work for solidarity, not charity; for activism, not clerico-bourgeois benevolence. As he put it,

> Christianity asks us to pray for the ‘wicked’ and to give alms, from time to time, to help the ‘poor’ and expiate our own sins, but it too is fiercely opposed to calling into question the capitalist system – which lets there be so many ‘poor’ in the world – and is opposed above all to the practical consequence of a lucid and honest criticism of the system: its overthrow.

Speaking for many who would eventually gravitate towards liberation theology, for Vallières the path from Mounier to Marx led further. It culminated in the forceful contestation of the prevailing political order of Québec.

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242 Hunt, 30. In this way, Vallières parallels Vincent Harvey’s ideas regarding October 1970 and structural violence.
243 Vallières, White Niggers of America, 14.
244 Ibid., 174.
CHAPTER FIVE
Francis Simard on Politicizing Daily Life

Vallières fiercely denounced Catholic charity as a form of pacification. Fundamentally, Francis Simard agreed with him. He distrusted the Church and its form of charity because it halted participatory democracy and genuine economic development. The critique of alms-giving was thus central to his liberationist critique. To Simard, charity supported a colonial mentality that repressed individual and community development. Creating a foundation for solidarity to flourish was therefore the aim of the focused attack on capitalism and the clerico-bourgeoisie that both Vallières and Simard as Felquistes promoted. Insisting that poverty itself was a sin and that its destruction ought to be the goal of a Québec Church informed by what they saw as true Christian mores, both men endorsed a preferential option for the poor. As Simard argued: “I’d rather have mutual aid than charity, since the latter is less a way of helping others and more a method of creating a personalized, selfish clean conscience for yourself. And nothing is ever solved.” Simard thus denounced Christian charity for subtly personalist reasons: Catholicism and capitalism were both dehumanizing systems that reinforced each other. They did not need repair. They needed replacement.

As a non-intellectual and a Felquiste, Simard shared ground with his better-read and more literary comrades in Parti Pris. Almost echoing Vallières, Simard observed that he became a member of the FLQ in order “to respect human life.” He did so to rise up “against the system where life was worth only the profit it could make.” Without outright using the word “alienation,” Simard captured many Marxist analyses of it when

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245 Simard., 79.
246 Ibid., 25.
247 Ibid.
he described his sense of the impoverishment and meaninglessness of the world of capitalism. “You’re fighting because you live in a world where no one really lives,” he states, “where life is constantly and brutally ground down, reduced, destroyed, murdered.” To him, capitalism as practised in Québec was violent. Without explicitly referencing personalists, he echoed Mounier’s and Vallières’s personalist declarations. Simard reiterated the denunciation of dehumanizing modernity found in much of personalist theology. Something in his words also resisted the elitism that he found in both the religious and economic traditions of Québec: “I never had the missionary touch. I hated what they called sacrifice. I don’t like people who only think about others, their brother’s keeper and all. I don’t like people who are always speaking on behalf of others.” Witnessing the Québec situation of the 1960s and the resistance of his fellow liberationists, Simard decided to speak for himself.

Needless to say, Simard was the odd man out in many respects. Specifically, his involvement with Laporte’s murder has led to his stigmatization and symbolic exile from the romanticized memories of 1960s protests. As both an activist and writer, he nevertheless exemplified both Partipriste and Felquiste perspectives well. Although he did not see himself as an intellectual and never contributed to Parti Pris, he was a worker politicized by the liberation movement in Québec. As he identified himself, Simard was a man who had tried every sort of political strategy available to him in order to attain the collective goals of Québécois liberation before opting for Felquiste violence. In and out of just about every separatist organization of the decade, Simard was particularly active

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248 Ibid., 28.
249 Wolf, 327.
250 Simard, 78.
251 He very may well have been a reader, as an issue of Québec libre in 1964 or 1965 initiated his interest in Québécois independence. See Simard, 62.
in the RIN.\textsuperscript{252} He was also arrested in the raids of seventy Company of Young Canadians groups in Québec in October 1969.\textsuperscript{253} Such ‘legitimate’ political activism has been overshadowed by the October Crisis of 1970. After a stint in prison for his involvement in Laporte’s death, he, like Maheu, would also become a filmmaker. Religion \textit{per se} may not be a common theme in Simard’s writing – in his entire memoir, only one account can be called “religious” in an obvious sense.\textsuperscript{254} But Catholic ideals of social justice suffuse Simard’s book. It is his work specifically which suggests that there are damaging limitations involved in painting the \textit{Felquistes} as insane criminals who were operating without any significant attachment to or influence upon Québec society.

When his book about the Laporte kidnapping and assassination was released in French as \textit{Pour en finir avec Octobre}, and when the English translation \textit{Talking it Out} was in the works, the one-sided negative criticism of its author was relentless. Very few observers were prepared to give Simard’s account an honest assessment. Articles came out insisting that “the book will be bought by thrillseekers,” that it may only “be regarded as a handbook for terrorists,” and that publishing and purchasing the book would give Simard substantial profits for glorifying a political assassination.\textsuperscript{255} Simard anticipated such dismissals. To him, commentators were “always looking for the loose wire that set

\begin{itemize}
\item\textsuperscript{252} \textit{Ibid.}, 63.
\item\textsuperscript{253} Although Fournier states that Simard was a \textit{Parti québécois} member in the Taillon riding at the time, Simard himself reports that he simply helped out at a single convention in order to find a candidate for that riding. He is adamant that his participation in electoral politics starts and ends with this experience. To compare, see Fournier, 167; and Simard, 98.
\item\textsuperscript{254} Simard, 81.
\item\textsuperscript{255} For instance, see Charles Lynch, “Who will speak for FLQ’s victim?” file “Francis Simard (dossier de presse)” Centre de documentation Desjardins en etudes québécoises, Université du Québec à Trois Rivières.
\end{itemize}
But, to Simard, they were mistaken: “You can’t reduce an individual to that, bypassing or completely ignoring the world that made him what he is.”

Contrary to the “thrill-seeker” jibe, Simard refused to expand upon the grisly details of the murder. Alongside the rest of the Chenier cell of Paul Rose, Jacques Rose, and Bernard Lortie, he insisted that Laporte’s assassination had been a collective act for which they were all responsible. Neither was his book on schedule to receive much remuneration. Simard was not simply a member of a “gang of murderers and cowards who kidnapped and killed.” He was a part of a generation of men and women throughout the world who were trying to create environments of fairness and social justice. The Chenier cell’s crime remains deplorable. The causes and motivations of the Felquistes and the strategies that they employed, however, stemmed from how Québec society was organized. Although their actions haphazardly resulted in murder, that murder was not without context. And much of that context was Catholic in Québec.

Like many of the other liberationists of the era, Simard felt himself to be deeply alienated from Québec politics, economics, and society. Although he sought to remedy this spiritual dilemma by joining a succession of political groups, none were able to permanently resolve it. Nor did he find any consolation or direction from the Church. Simard’s direct experience with the Church was unlike that of the other men studied here. He did not share their seminarian experiences. The personal encounters with the faith that Simard does share are limited to his experiences as an altar boy. He remarks that he

256 Simard, 65.
257 Ibid.
258 The initially proposed publisher, Alain Stanke, planned to have a 20,000-volume print run that, if sold out, would have earned Simard $8300. See Beverley Slopen, “No English deal yet for Simard,” The Gazette (Montréal), December 4 1982.
259 Len Cocolicchio, “‘We should never forget crimes of FLQ killers and kidnappers,” file “Francis Simard (dossier de presse)” Centre de documentation Desjardins en etudes québécoises, Université du Québec à Trois Rivières.
never experienced ‘ecstasy’ or the ‘mystery of religious ardour’ when I was serving Mass. Our priest was always too much in a hurry. You had to run to keep up with him. There was no time for flights of feeling. Our family was religious, we were practicing Catholics, we went to Mass. You had to go whether you wanted to or not. I don’t remember ever having what they call ‘a crisis of faith.’ I don’t remember ever saying to myself, ‘My belief is gone. God has deserted my heart.’ Religion or belief in a Supreme Being was never a problem for me. I just never believed and never felt the need to. It wasn’t important.\textsuperscript{260}

He fought for a secular Québec not because of any deep-seated religious convictions that were being misconstrued in Catholic Québec. Rather, he did so because he identified the Church as one important cause of many of the ills of the society in which he and other liberationists lived, and from which he felt estranged.

Even though he himself felt little tie to religion, Catholicism remained a factor in Simard’s life. Unlike other liberationists, he could not easily imagine finding an alternative life within the Church. By 1970, all peaceful alternatives to armed struggle had, from his perspective, vanished. Never really defending such a highly contentious position, what was for him significant was that the Chenier cell acted on its principles.

For Simard, such were the acts that could push Québec forward:

\begin{quote}
I won’t get up and say that I was one hundred percent right, that I did exactly the right thing. Maybe we were wrong, maybe we missed the boat. But if you live with ‘maybe’ and ‘if’ all the time, you’ll never change, you’ll never prove or demonstrate anything. You’ll always be wrong if you live like that. We were right because we tried, we didn’t say ‘maybe … if only …’\textsuperscript{261}
\end{quote}

In a sense, such notions were a radicalized version of Major’s thoughts on becoming politically active to overcome and transform the existing morality of failure of Catholic Québec. Such sentiments aligned with the growing radical interest in the guerilla wars...\textsuperscript{260} Simard, 81-82.
\textsuperscript{261} \textit{Ibid.}, 171.
being waged in the global South. Violence, it seemed to many radicals in the early 1970s, might indeed force the pace of history. Waiting had long ceased to be a virtue. And the men who picked up the gun were often young, impatient, and imprudent.

Many observers then and now have argued that the FLQ’s violence was unwarranted because it bore little relation to past wrongs and future benefits. Others, however, have sought to contextualize the Felquistes’ choice of violence. Father Vincent Harvey understood October 1970 in this latter way. Although the contributors of Maintenant were by no means on the same page with respect to the FLQ and Parti Pris, Harvey – the journal’s separatist Dominican editor – represented a major tendency among them. In the October 25, 1970 issue of Québec Presse, he “declared that ‘it is too easy to say that Pierre Laporte was killed by a handful of terrorists. … with their finger on the trigger. … who put the gun into their hands? … I refuse to pass judgment.’”262 This spoke directly to the ills of structural violence that liberationists targeted. In their own eyes, Simard and his comrades met the violence that they had experienced in their daily lives with the violence that they could inflict by taking action in the FLQ.

Echoing Frantz Fanon, Simard argued that violence was important to the movement as a whole. It exemplified the will to act on the basis of a newly-acquired political consciousness. Simard insisted that “there might have been a time when taking [up] arms was necessary, but the gun itself doesn’t matter – what really counts is the number of men and women willing to arm themselves.”263 Many Québécois had the individual will to act because of the structural violence that they had suffered as a group. Like Simard, many thought that they had exhausted all of the other political options

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262 Quoted in John Saywell, Quebec 70: A Documentary Narrative (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1971), 106.
263 Simard, 162.
available to them. That more and more Québécois were willing to commit violent acts was simply proof to liberationists like Simard that an increasing number of Québécois were prepared to be actors in their own history. *Felquistes* action could rouse Catholic Québec from its slumber.

Creating history and spurring others to do so was thus at the root of what both *Partipristes* and *Felquistes* sought through their liberationist rhetoric. *Parti Pris* created history by applying theories and making analyses of local and global liberation movements. The FLQ used violence to initiate their own liberation. Fournier remarks that the FLQ “saw its role as a ‘detonator,’ an accelerator of History.” Their initial bomb blasts in March 1963 were widely seen as acts that pushed Québécois history forward. Hubert Aquin, an artistic and political activist within the liberationist milieu, even insisted that such acts were the first ones in a “people’s autonomous history.” In their own minds, the *Felquistes’* use of violence effectively gave them claim over their nation’s trajectory. For the FLQ, violence made history-making possible. Maheu remembers thinking, when he heard of the FLQ, “‘my god, I said to myself, history can happen here as well as anywhere else.’” Operating under vastly different conditions, some proponents of liberation theology in Latin America made somewhat similar arguments in religious terms. The FLQ never did. In their public manifestoes, religion was characterized as an enemy tied too closely with the state and capitalism to ever be an ally.

Concentrating on the violence entailed in these drives to ‘make history’ impedes an understanding of both *Parti Pris* and FLQ rationales for liberation struggles. Violence

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264 Fournier, 14.
265 Kostash, 214.
266 Reid, 296.
was not the most prevalent tactic of the Québécois liberationists. It was just the most brazen. For men like Simard, October 1970 was about “showing that progress is possible. That nothing’s immutable and set down forever.”\textsuperscript{267} It was not about inflicting pain for terror’s sake. However criminal the tactics of the FLQ were, Felquistes violence was used in order to provide the Québécois with an example of political action. In a way, they sought to inspire the masses with the same idealistic activism that had so impressed Maheu with his coverage of the MLF. They sought to awaken the lethargic Québécois in their midst and arouse them to set Québec history on a new pace. By usurping the existing state’s monopoly on legitimized violence, the Felquistes sought to challenge that very state. The rights and freedoms that the Québec and Canadian governments conceded to the Québécois were not enough to alleviate mass impoverishment and oppression that persisted throughout society, said the FLQ. As such, arming themselves was claimed as a justifiable reaction.

Perhaps the most telling evidence against the stigmatizing strategy of treating the Felquistes as if they were deranged criminals can be found in the complicated reactions of many Québécois to the October Crisis. There remained a considerable base of FLQ support for their Manifesto and the group’s critique of the political order, not their armed tactics. Simard framed their actions in historic terms by stating that “there are times when history is being made in your own backyard, history belongs to you. When a large enough group of people shares that feeling, you get a period of mobilization and involvement. Action transcends the individual and takes root throughout an entire society.”\textsuperscript{268} Like many other liberationists, Simard saw a socialist historical bloc

\textsuperscript{267} Simard, 21.
\textsuperscript{268} Simard, 117.
emerging in Québec. As Mills remarks, the very “language of decolonization armed citizens with the conviction that society, rather than being the natural or inevitable result of history, was an active project of creation … countless individuals began asserting their claim to be the makers rather than just the inheritors of culture.”

For Simard, solidarity provided the true meaning of life because it vested individuals with power. For him, living effectively meant challenging the limits of the existing religious and electoral modes of action that were on offer in Québec. Such structures seemed to exclude individuals like Simard from control over their own personal decisions and actions.

In *Talking it Out*, Simard grappled honestly with Québécois liberation. He extended the *Partipriste* stance of secularism by directly associating it with the theological implications of liberation that Chamberland, Major, Maheu and Vallières all discuss in their respective writings. In his memoir, he set out the liberationist ethic and its underlying Catholic foundations with little direct reference to Catholicism, Catholic theology, and Catholic Québec. The least religious of the men under study here and ostensibly indifferent to the Catholic faith’s centrality in Québec history from a theological perspective, Simard shows that religion was nonetheless a formative element in his own individual history.

Simard took pains to declare his indifference to heavenly salvation. Here he paralleled a theme developed by Chamberland for whom the afterlife meant little. Rather, the motivation of making this world better was what led him to *Partipriste* secularism. When Simard remarked that “we have one life to live, and it’s damned important because

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270 Simard, 69.
it’s the only one,” he underlines the temporal goals of social justice that he thought should underlie Québécois politics.\textsuperscript{271}

Major’s attempt to rethink the morality of failure was also mirrored in Simard’s work. Like other liberationists, Simard too discussed Catholicism in terms of the mass resignation upon which Québec’s colonial masters relied. It encouraged an obedient attitude to the ruling order that was ultimately based on the fear of failure. Simard questioned the benefits of this morality: “[W]hy bend, accept, obey, suffer, all the time?”\textsuperscript{272} Simard was exasperated by Québec’s injustices and the resigned Catholicism that acquiesced in them. Instead, he warmly endorsed the sort of progressive politics that Maheu cherished in the MLF. Maheu’s focus on the MLF and democratic participation further substantiated not only a more active Catholic laity. It also fortified the democratization of Québec as a whole. Deriving inspiration from the same currents as those that inspired the Partipristes, Simard insisted on action. His was not necessarily an un- or non-Catholic position. He simply reiterated the Partiprisme position on the Church, which called upon the institution to live up to its responsibilities to the wider community.

Connecting these aspects of Québec Catholicism to a proto-liberation theology, Simard himself suggested that the tenets of Catholic liberation actually provided an opening to non-religious considerations. As he remarked with reference to Latin America, “for a lot of people, being a Christian means being involved socially, fighting against poverty, exploitation, the establishment ... religion can give meaning to involvement.”\textsuperscript{273} Catholicism could further the liberation of Québec in the same way. He used the example of liberation theology in Latin America to illustrate the benefits of a

\textsuperscript{271} \textit{Ibid.}, 68.
\textsuperscript{272} \textit{Ibid.}, 51.
\textsuperscript{273} \textit{Ibid.}, 84.
Church working towards the programs of political solidarity that he wanted for a secular Québec.274

Simard’s stance toward Catholicism was thus non-adversarial. He was not against the faith per se. Rather, like so many of his contemporaries, he was against an apolitical and apathetic Church. Echoing Vallières, Simard noted that “it doesn’t bother me if people believe in God. They can be religious if they want to, I respect that.”275 Surely, both men held an advanced understanding of Catholicism that was applicable to their visions of a new Québec. Their shared belief in human action permeated the liberationist ethic of history-making and a morality that was directed towards political mobilization. Both were impatient with a religion oriented to the Hereafter. Both thought the political mobilization of all Québécois, whether clergy, lay, or otherwise, was the only way forward.276 To take the step into political activism meant “taking our destiny into our own hands. It wasn’t to the detriment of others, it was with others.”277 Simard’s focus on earthly betterment therefore put him and other liberationists at the risk of stepping on Church toes. But it did so through an ethic of solidarity that at its core sought genuine betterment for the nation as a whole. Such sentiments would also be proclaimed by many a revolutionary Catholic in Central and South America.

Like Major, Simard also insists that mistakes were part of this process of personal and collective liberation. Admitting errors and attempting to fix them was the goal of the new humanized politic that the liberationists attempted to create and sustain. The RIN

274 Ibid.
275 Ibid., 83-84.
276 Ibid., 67.
277 Ibid., 68.
was just that for Simard.\textsuperscript{278} He knew that others viewed groups like the RIN (and later, the FLQ) differently:

> When people talk about the RIN they always criticize it the same way. They say it was more a pressure group for independence than an authentic political party. That sounds colonialized to me. … It’s like they were telling us that real politics is none of our business. Telling us that politics and the power over our own lives were beyond our means.\textsuperscript{279}

Simard and other liberationists claimed that politicization was the best way towards decolonization for Québec. Through politics, revolutionary groups could influence the trajectory of their members’ daily lives. Revolutionary politics offered individual and collective empowerment thus.

> Every facet of life and every individual action was thus a part of the political process for the liberationists. Francis Simard could sound very much like Vallières when he came to denounce the emptiness and frivolity of life under capitalism: “You realize you’ll never fulfill your potential in a world like this one. It offers a life of routine and boredom. A nice little job. For a good company. Hang on no matter what. Think of the future, move up, get married, get a nice apartment or a house in the suburbs. If you’re lucky, if you work hard, if you keep quiet.”\textsuperscript{280} But being politically active changed everything for Simard. In organizations like the RIN or the FLQ, he remarked, “you’re not just looking and listening and participating – you’re thinking too.”\textsuperscript{281} Sure, he said that the political life was demanding. “If you have other dreams, if you want to make your own decisions, you might as well forget it,” Simard remarks. “Politics is dirty. It’s

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\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{278} Ibid., 71.
\item \textsuperscript{279} Ibid., 72.
\item \textsuperscript{280} Ibid., 72-73.
\item \textsuperscript{281} Ibid.
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too complicated. Power isn’t in your world. You have no decisions to make.”\textsuperscript{282} But this sort of satiric rant concludes with Simard’s epiphany: “[S]uddenly you realize somebody’s trying to rip off your life.”\textsuperscript{283} As Simard remarks, “we got involved in October because we wanted to be masters of our lives.”\textsuperscript{284} “I believe we can master our lives,” he adds. “I didn’t say it was easy, I said it was possible, but you have to have the will. You have to be willing to fight for it.”\textsuperscript{285}

Working with separatist filmmaker Pierre Falardeau on a film years later, Simard still held onto the same ideas of political action. Falardeau reports that it was “in the process of [making \textit{Octobre}] with Francis Simard that I understood how, for him, politics was everyday and how our independence was with him in his skin, in his brain, in his belly.”\textsuperscript{286} For liberationists like Simard, politics was the stuff of daily life. It gave life meaning. Although for many it began to take up the space in one’s life that the Church had once occupied, for Simard it was the only way to change the oppressive circumstances that had exasperated him in the years leading up to October 1970.

\textsuperscript{282} \textit{Ibid.}
\textsuperscript{283} \textit{Ibid.}
\textsuperscript{284} \textit{Ibid.}, 73.
\textsuperscript{285} \textit{Ibid.}, 82.
CONCLUSION
Reappraising the Historical Narrative of the Laporte Assassination

Catholicism remains a major theme in Québec’s history. Religion in the province did not disappear over the course of the 1960s. Radicals, even those ostensibly committed to atheism, could not abandon Catholicism overnight. They resisted not religion itself. Instead, they rebelled against a particular brand of Catholic resignation that, for them, had come to permeate Québec. Their ideas about alleviating poverty and creating a more humane society were often rooted in or at least paralleled by early Christianity, Catholic personalism, and proto-liberation theology. They maintained beliefs in human potential and solidarity that were based on these theological interpretations of Catholicism. Their Catholicism remained in both the reasons for their resistance and the very tools that they used for that rebellion.

Laporte was killed in the heat of these Québécois struggles. It was an error of both moral and political proportions. It allowed the ruling order to depict and remember the ‘moment of liberation’ as one of cruelty, derangement, and criminality. In what would become a dominant reading, Laporte was killed by heretical terrorists so anti-Catholic that they used a religious medallion as a murder weapon. He was later given a funeral fit for a martyr.287 Memorial ceremonies, the augmented tradition insisting on the religious significance of the murder weapon, representations of bearded and menacing Felquistes in the media, and vitriolic reviews of many of their writings have all helped to construct the image of the anti-Catholic terrorist in Québec. The truth, however, has always been

287 This state funeral was mounted against the wishes of his family. For further information, see an article written by Laporte’s nephew: Claude Laporte, “Octobre n’en finit plus,” La Presse December 24 1982. For the martyr narrative surrounding Laporte as used in literary artifact, see the poetry in Robin Mathews, “For a Long Time There was no Snow in Ottawa,” in The Geography of Revolution (Barry’s Bay: SRI, 1974), 21-22.
more complicated than that tale suggests. The social justice tenets of Catholicism were cherished by many liberationists regardless if they were believers in the faith or not. Even the maligned Chenier Cell, the most demonized radicals of all, often put their case in a language that owed much to a Marxist-Catholic dialectic.

The liberationist critique of the clerico-bourgeoisie in Québec was based on a desire to fulfill basic human needs that institutional Catholicism in Québec was seen to be neglecting. The liberationists believed that poverty was wrong. To them, it was a sin. The Church appeared to uphold that very poverty as an ideal instead of trying to alleviate it. Liberationists thus insisted that solving poverty through Christian charity only reinforced the very foundations that required the benevolence that sustained it in the first place. Revolutionary solidarity, not alms, would end the cyclical sins of poverty and injustice. This was what the Partipriste three-tiered structural revolution of separatism, secularism, and socialism was all about.

Chamberland’s use of biblical symbolism throughout his work suggested how he believed Catholic motifs could be put to work for radical ends. He used the religion embedded in Québec to make both his poetry and decolonization tracts comprehensible to the faithful Québécois. Both properly and profanely, Chamberland used Catholic ideas in an effort to be understood. In his case, Catholicism informed the style and substance of his work in the resistance.

On the other hand, Major directly confronted the ethics of Catholic Québec. Like the other liberationists, he too blamed the Catholic education system for inculcating a widespread morality of failure that permeated Québec society. His resistance to a
resigned sort of Catholicism drew on personalism and early versions of liberation theology in order to challenge the status quo of Catholic Québec.

Maheu believed that, once awakened from their Church-induced dogmatic slumbers, people could make history. He too detested the morality of failure that Major delineated. He dreamt instead of an active Québécois population that was able to defend itself and add its strength to human progress. He insisted that the Québécois were able to make their own change. For some liberationists, it seemed like Québec could do so only by resisting the sort of faith that seemed to forbid such alterations. Despite his atheism, Maheu was nevertheless drawn towards the MLF. It proved to him that grassroots Catholicism could indeed be mobilized in the interests of the anticlerical revolution that served Québécois liberation.

Although in many respects Vallières was the most firmly attached to the Church both before and after his revolutionary years, he condemned the clerico-bourgeoisie more fervently than any other liberationist. No one was more vehement in their denunciations of the Québec Church’s collaboration with capitalism. No one laid more stress on Catholic responsibility for the current state of colonial oppression. Liberation theology, emerging as a coherent and concomitant tendency, was a Catholicism that supported the decolonization of Latin America and elsewhere. It did so in Catholically socialist ways that paralleled what Vallières and other liberationists were saying in Québec. Vallières’s later gravitation to this theological position was anticipated by many arguments that he himself had advanced in the 1960s.

Simard’s understanding of the liberationist ethic also mobilized the new Catholic theologies. He was the polar opposite of Vallières in some respects. What pushed the
latter to action had almost no purchase on the former. Yet Simard no less than Vallières was still obliged to think about Catholicism and its influence in Québec. He would come to articulate a philosophy of solidarity similar to those forms of Catholicism that attained great political power in El Salvador and Nicaragua. Even someone as expressly uninterested in religion as Simard came to appreciate the inescapable presence of it in any liberation movement arising in a still very religious society.

Religion remained crucial to the liberationist ethic of 1960s and 1970s Québec. In many ways, it outlived the tragic death of Laporte. Historians seeking to understand these decades in Québec must bear in mind the radicals’ Catholic context. Whether they espoused or rejected, admitted or denied, rebutted or affirmed Catholic influences, each and every one of them had to operate within a milieu in which the faith’s influence was palpable. This is the core argument that this thesis has urged to challenge those narratives that dwell exclusively on the disestablishment and discrediting of the institutional Church during the liberatory fervour of the 1960s. The historical account can no longer sidestep the influence of Catholicism on Québécois liberation when it comes to Parti Pris and the FLQ. This story of the process that the liberationists experienced when they took to creating what they saw as a new Québec is the one that must be told.
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