

Making All Things New: The Mystical Anti-Modernism of *Lacouturisme* in Québec

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For too long, too little had been expected of us. When Christ spoke, he spoke from the Mount to the multitudes. He called on all men to take up their cross and follow Him. When we listened to Fr. Lacouture's retreat, we began to understand the distinction between nature and the supernatural (we understand that grace builds on nature and we saw for the first time man's spiritual capacities raised as he is to be a child of God). We saw the basis of our dignity. . . The retreat gave us hope and courage, as retreats are supposed to do, and we will be everlastingly grateful for it, grateful to Fr. Lacouture, who made the retreat possible for us. We feel that we have been participants in a great spiritual movement which is still going on, though it is perhaps now in shadow. The seed has fallen into the ground and has died. But we know that it will bear great fruit.¹

It was the personal decision of our Very Reverend Father General, and on his expressed orders, that the Reverend Father Lacouture has ceased to give his retreats to the clergy, and has been transferred to one of the Society's American provinces. . . I should add that before these many urgent recommendations of the Very Rev. Fr. General and the provincials, we did not find in Lacouture the respect, deference, and submission that would demonstrate in him to be a man animated by the spirit of God. He was resistant, and spread sharp, contemptuous, and unedifying criticism against his superiors—not excepting the Very Rev. Fr. General, nor the ecclesiastical authorities which did not fully approve of his teaching... If he had known to humbly accept the comments and recommendations of his superiors, he would have avoided the debates that his teaching and presentation raised, and would not be responsible for the interruption of an apostolate that could have been much more successful.²

1. Dorothy Day, "Death of Father Onesimus Lacouture, S.J." in *The Catholic Worker* (December 1951): 1, 6, <http://www.catholicworker.org/dorothyday/daytext.cfm?TextID=944>.

2. Émile Papillon, SJ, to Ildebrando Antoniutti (AJC [BO-0167-1,1], 29 March 1940).

The funeral of Onésime Lacouture, SJ, was by all accounts an underwhelming affair. The once-iconic mystical revivalist preacher had languished in relative obscurity for upwards of a decade, having been stripped of his priestly faculties, and reduced to working as a bursar in Upstate New York's impoverished St. Regis mission to the *Haudenosaunee*, before dying suddenly from a stroke November 15, 1951. None of his small cadre of devoted clerical disciples from the United States were present, having all been forbidden from making a final pilgrimage north. The single non-blood-related American in attendance was, as it were, also his most celebrated. Dorothy Day, co-founder and unofficial “mother superior” of the Catholic Worker movement, had made the trip on short notice, and gave an emotional eulogy at the funeral mass—presided over by the Bishop of Valleyfield, Alfred Langlois. Lacouture—who blazed a trail of ultrasupernaturalist anti-modernism that galvanized thousands of *Canadien* seminarians and clergy to a vigorous spiritual reform—was laid to rest with little fanfare or public acknowledgement. Although the movement that he founded sputtered in his native province, following his formal suppression in 1939, the occasionally cinematic controversy over “*Lacouturisme*” served as a bellwether for a subtle but tectonic transformation in the Québécois social order that came to fruition in the Quiet Revolution of the 1960s.

The Lacouture controversy saw perennial Christian theological debates firmly root themselves on *Canadien* soil—the relationship between human nature and divine grace, the universality of the call to perfection, self-renunciation. However, it was fundamentally a rivalry between competing “alternately modern” visions of freedom. The tide of reactionary nationalist Catholicism galvanized Depression-era *patriotes* around an ethic of self-determination and *Canadien* spiritual supremacy that pushed back against the cultural apostasy of Anglo-assimilation. Alternately, a nascent personalism prefigured the creative *aggiornamento* codified in the Second Vatican Council of the 1960s, and concomitant disestablishment of the institutional Québécois Church. Onésime Lacouture's own virtually *anti*-social doctrine called for a maximalist asceticism that rejected the perceived snares of modern “social Catholicism”—conceived in terms of worldly material addiction, rather than real liberation. Lying just below the surface was the classic Augustinian distinction between the freedom of self-determination and the well-ordered freedom to choose the objectively “Good,” which undergirded more practical disagreements over Church involvement in

union organizing, politics, and free-market capitalism—although the dispute eventually devolved into a peculiar fixation on more leisurely moral quandaries over car radios, bingo, and tobacco.³ Although the very generation that came of age amidst a militant nationalist spiritual ferment—ferociously marshaled by Lionel Groulx—eventually oversaw the almost wholesale dismantling of Catholic infrastructure and clerical hegemony in the postconciliar era, Lacouture and his rigorist disciples interpreted this social orientation as an ignorant abdication of authentic spiritual freedom. However, his suppression signaled the entrance of mainstream *Canadien* culture into a more cosmopolitan, “secular” environment.

Mark Massa, SJ’s treatment of “The Boston Heresy Case”—the suppression and eventual excommunication (1953) of Leonard Feeney—employs Émile Durkheim’s theory of social deviance and boundary maintenance in contending that the case of Feeney and his Slaves of the Immaculate Heart of Mary inadvertently empowered an evolutionary shift in the Catholic consensus on American pluralism:

3. Augustine of Hippo, *De Libero Arbitrio*, III.21, in *Augustine: Earlier Writings*, ed. J.H.S. Burleigh (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1953), 183: “If, therefore, you wish to escape misery, love the very desire you have to exist. For if you wish more and more to exist, you will draw near to him who exists supremely....All things are to be praised for the reason that they exist; for what exists is for that reason alone good. The more fully you love to have being the more fully will you desire eternal life, and choose to be formed to that your affections will not be set on temporal things....He who loves existence approves them [things] so far as they have existence, but loves what has eternal existence. If, loving temporal things, he was weak and variable, loving eternal things he will be made strong. If he was distracted by love of transient things, by love of that which abides he will be made stable.” In modern times, this was explicitly defined during the Second Vatican Council by the pastoral council *Gaudium et Spes*, 17, in *Vatican Council II: Constitutions, Decrees, Declarations*, ed. Austin Flannery, OP (Northport, NY: Costello Publishing Company, 1966), 179: “But genuine freedom is an exceptional sign of the image of God in humanity. For God willed that men and women should “be left free to make their own decisions: so that they might of their own accord seek their creator and freely attain their full and blessed perfection by cleaving to God. Their dignity therefore requires them to act out of conscious and free choice, as moved and drawn in a personal way from within, and not by their own blind impulses or by external constraint. People gain such dignity when, freeing themselves of all slavery to the passions, they press forward towards their goal by freely choosing what is good, and, by their diligence and skill, effectively secure for themselves the means suited to this end. Since human freedom has been weakened by sin it is only by the help of God’s grace that people can properly orientate their actions toward God.”

[...] Feeney and the entire Boston Heresy Case served an absolutely essential function for North American Catholicism at a crucial moment in its history: Feeney and his disciples provided the occasion for boundary maintenance in a new cultural context. Doctrinal positions that had been considered rigorous but nonetheless orthodox at an earlier moment in North American Catholic history were now perceived to be beyond the pale—beliefs that the collective now declared to be deviant and even dangerous to the life of the community. The collective conscience had changed, the boundary between what constituted inside and outside had moved or been scaled down, and the official interpretation of “outside the church” had changed with it.⁴

As Massa notes, the irony of Feeney’s transgressions was born from the harsh truth that his position was actually vintage orthodox Catholicism. Leonard Feeney’s wild popularity emerged from his position as a reactionary culture warrior, electrifying an elite class of Ivy Leaguers from his post as chaplain of Cambridge, Massachusetts’s St. Benedict’s Center, just a stone’s throw away from the prestigious and traditionally WASP-heavy quad of Harvard University. Although Feeney’s expulsion from the Society of Jesus and temporary excommunication (he was reinstated in 1972) was formally based on his transgression of vows of obedience, his inflexible fidelity to St. Cyprian’s proclamation, *extra ecclesiam nulla salus* (“outside the Church there is no salvation”), marked a clear disconnect with the traditional position of the post-Constantinian Church.⁵ In this sense, for American Catholicism to sever its ties to the late nineteenth century’s fixation on the invasive “Americanist” heresy, Feeney’s hard-line rigidity made for a convenient—and *necessary*—scapegoat that empowered the Church to redefine its relationship to the “melting pot” of modern industrial culture.⁶ This antedated the wider Church’s official “Declaration on Religious Freedom” (*Dignitatis Humanae*), but clarified a doctrine that had already been passively received in less explicit form.

4. Mark S. Massa, SJ, “On the Uses of Heresy: Leonard Feeney, Mary Douglas, and the Notre Dame Football Team,” *The Harvard Theological Review* 84:3 (3 July 1991): 340.

5. Augustine of Hippo’s caveats about the hopeful exception made for the “good pagans” notwithstanding; *City of God*, 1.35, 5.12, trans. Henry Bettenson (New York: Penguin Books, 1972).

6. Will Herberg, *Protestant, Catholic, Jew: An Essay in American Religious Sociology* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1955), 27.

The Lacouture affair, while somewhat less theatrical due its dearth of anathemas, was potentially even more dynamic, and similarly marked the entrance of Catholicism into a new phase of development in respect to “the world.” In a different time and place, Lacouture’s “doctrine”—which he defended to his death as orthodox and decidedly *uninnovative*—found itself ill-suited to the new “plausibility structures” of Québécois society as it settled into twentieth-century urban-industrial capitalism and cosmopolitan culture. Michael Gauvreau’s treatment of secularization in Québec—which saw the almost complete dismantling of Roman Catholic infrastructure and clericalism—traced the roots of this “Quiet Revolution” to the turn-of-the-century militant social Catholicism that inspired a generation of *Canadien* youth (including future prime minister Pierre Elliott Trudeau) to envision themselves as crusading rebels, rejecting their predecessors’ more passive assimilation of oppressive Anglo-Protestant norms.⁷ Gauvreau’s thesis posits that the spirit of revolution that emerged among these self-consciously militant Francophone Catholics psychologically amputated itself from attachment to its immediate generational predecessors, and thus, when the full weight of modernity struck *la belle province*, religious observance dissolved, along with the garishly medieval social structures that predominated.

In grossly abridged form, the conventional narrative of American Catholicism follows a linear pattern (modeled on the classical “American Dream”), wherein a dirty, impoverished, and persecuted refugee class of European Catholics (in the caricature, mostly Irish, with scattered showers of Italians) suffer at the hand of “Nativist” discrimination, xenophobia, and exploitation. Through sheer grit, numbers (the “revenge of the cradle”), faith, and blood sacrifice (military service), Catholics proved their patriotism and assimilated into the mainstream of American culture—the 1960 election of John F. Kennedy to the U.S. presidency cementing the process of integration. This streamlined narrative ignores major complicating evidence, but it has—and continues to—set the tone. Will Herberg’s triple-melting pot model of American civil religion posited a mainstream amalgamation of respectable “Protestant-Catholic-Jews.” While the validity of this thesis might have been more aspirational than actual—or at least geographically

7. Michael Gauvreau, *The Catholic Origins of Quebec’s Quiet Revolution, 1931–1970* (Montréal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2005).

restricted at the time of composition, it nevertheless reflected a widely accepted vision of American Catholic progress. Québec was a quite different animal: from its formal colonial origins, the history of Catholicism in the region was one of clerical domination—or at least lack of competition, until France’s nineteenth-century abandonment of its North American holdings to the Crown in 1763. Whereas in the majority of US land holdings and other portions of what is now Canada, Catholic immigrants formed an underclass minority population; in Québec they dominated.

Although one must be careful not to overstate the pervasiveness of messianic self-awareness within the pre-revolutionary *Canadien* psyche, at the very least, Francophone rhetorical spin adopted a clear, if sometimes internally inconsistent, eschatological tone. In the wake of the trauma of the French Revolution, *Canadien* settlers envisioned migration to their newly adopted home through a cosmic lens that recapitulated the biblical sojourn in the wilderness from the Book of Exodus. The fusion of “French” and “Roman Catholic” identities facilitated the production of a colonial self-identity as a “remnant” of God’s chosen who preserved the faith in exile from their native land, which had been overrun by the apostasy of secular modernism—sealed in blood by the martyrdom of thousands of Catholic faithful who died at the hands of their revolutionary countrymen.⁸ The harsh wilds of North America were welcomed as a promised land wherein the Church might take refuge from the waves of atheistic secularism that swept over Europe. This model, although particular to the context of the French Catholic *mentalité*, bore a strong resemblance to the stereotypical American “Manifest Destiny” interpretation of colonization as self-evidently providential.

An alternate, but no less epic, *Canadien* origin myth that gained prominence as the cloud of English domination loomed ever larger seemed to take a lesson right out of Ireland’s rhetorical playbook, depicting “Lower Canada” (as it was formally named until 1841) as an indigenously Roman Catholic land, toiling under the bondage of Anglo-Protestant oppression from without. Again, this vision harkened back to Exodus, but this time drew inspiration from the Babylonian Captivity. Although in both cases, *Canadien* patriots might be excused for their hyperbole as par for the course, these were

8. Gregory Baum, *The Church in Quebec* (Ottawa: Novalis, 1991); David Martin, *A General Theory of Secularization* (New York: Harper & Row, 1978).

poignant narratives. Most prominent among the vanguard of “Laurentian” revivalists was the *Canadien* supremacist, “clerico-nationalist historian” (and sometime novelist) Lionel-Adolphe Groulx (1878–1967).⁹ Groulx called for a vigorous fusion of Catholicism and Québécois nationalism. He envisioned “*un peuple français dans un pays français*,” presupposing a direct correspondence between French ethnicity and Catholic faith.¹⁰ The survival of French Canada depended on a cultural renaissance, and the renewal of a “French mystique.”¹¹ Groulx’s separatist interpretation of Canadian political history, and his vision for Francophone renewal, had a profound impact on Québécois social identity, and was critical in forming a pointed pedagogical mission among elite secondary schools of the 1930s—if only retrospectively, given the political titans that they produced. As a young

9. The “Laurentie” was the poetic name contemporary secessionists gave to an imaginary independent Québec. Max Nemni and Monique Nemni, *Young Trudeau: Song of Quebec, Father of Canada, 1919–1944* (Toronto: McClelland & Steward Ltd., 2006), 73.

10. Nemni and Nemni, *Young Trudeau*, 62.

11. Lionel Groulx’s novel *L’Appel de la Race* was a classic example of his preferred medium of proselytizing *Canadien* patriotism. His character Wolfred (André) functions as the paradigmatic rehabilitated Francophone, who—previously bent under the weight of English rule and cultural inferiority—awakens to the wellspring of Québécois dignity, then beginning down a course of patriotic re-education and self-discovery. Lionel Groulx, *The Iron Wedge (L’Appel de la Race)*, trans. Michel Gaulin (Ottawa: Carleton University Press, 1989), 174–175: “All at once, the land spoke to me with a beauty and charm all its own, and the lesson was not lost. Once begun, my evolution was nurtured by very thorough readings of carefully chosen French works, which soon restored in me a sense of coherence and balance... You may not believe it, but the defections among our own people gave me the second push. At the sight of those men and women who had ostentatiously taken on a mentality that wasn’t their own, I felt that an iron hand had descended on the soul of my people. My young pride revolted. I was reading our history at the time. In it I discovered, every day, the old soil in which my spirit had its natural roots. Besides those deserters, few in number, I could see the others, those who have resisted, and who go on resisting and who carry a whole people with them. Shall I admit it? The sight of that little group of Frenchmen, surrounded by a hundred or so millions of Anglo-Saxons, but magnificently persistent in not giving in, the sight of that American Alsace-Lorraine, more alone and more forgotten that [*sic*] the other one, but no less enduring, no less faithful to itself for a period of one hundred and sixty-six years, the sight of a people that places above all material ambitions the pride of its culture and the worth of its soul, that is a sight which I assure you I found to be of stirring beauty, superior to anything that the other civilization had shown me until then. I noted also to my great joy, that if the Anglo-Saxons subjugate a few odd groups pretty well everywhere as they do here, with their money and their customs, they subjugate no one by their literature and their arts.”

student at Montréal's Jesuit Collège Jean-de-Brébeuf, Pierre Elliott Trudeau (1919–2000) was indoctrinated into a messianic Francophone Catholicism of cultural salvation, as was his eventual Parti Québécois nemesis from across the province, René Lévesque. This infused a generation of adolescent patricians with an Anglophobic siege mentality, and instilled an ethos of revolutionary *noblesse oblige*—Groulx's "*l'appel de la race*"—among the ascendant political class.¹²

Although it was a self-consciously reactionary movement pitted against the blossoming socially conscious Catholicism of the era, *Lacouturisme* emerged from the same muscular, supernatural *mentalité* that undergirded the collective lifeworld of post-Confederation Québec. The narrative of *Canadien*—and particularly Québécois—Catholic history dovetails occasionally with its counterpart in the United States, but simultaneously also mirrors colonized “native” Catholic environs such as Ireland and Poland, where the Church emerged as a symbol of resistance identity politics.¹³ Late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Québécois Catholicism mimicked conventional stereotypes of American “ghetto Catholicism”: racially insular, sectarian, largely uneducated, proletarian, politically conservative, clannish. In the decades bookending World War I, French-Canadians—*les Canadiens*—displayed a schizophrenic self-identity, simultaneously immigrant and xenophobe, colonizer and colonized, nationalist (relative to Québec) and assimilationist (relative to Canada), socially and politically conservative, while revolutionary and messianic. *Canadiens* were almost willfully naïve in their plagiarism of indigenous status in the face of Protestant British occupation. As such, even without raising the specter of Québécois nationalism—an issue that precipitated a broad spectrum of responses within the province following Canadian Confederation in 1867—French Canada largely maintained a partisan sensibility and siege-mentality defensiveness regarding its adoptive sibling. *Canadiens* (reductively, it must be admitted) envisioned themselves as a

12. John English, *Citizen of the World: The Life of Pierre Elliott Trudeau, Volume One: 1919–1968* (Toronto: Vintage Canada, 2007), 29.

13. Gregory Baum, “Comparing Post-World War II Catholicism in Quebec, Ireland, and the United States” in *The Church Confronts Modernity: Catholicism since 1950 in the United States, Ireland, & Quebec*, ed. Leslie Woodcock Tentler (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2007), 269.

remnant vestige of authentic Catholic Christianity from a modernized Europe overrun by atheist humanism and materialist individualism.¹⁴ Somewhat ironically, this all evaporated during the rapid cultural and political overhaul of Québec society in the 1960s—in many respects spearheaded by the very individuals who had trumpeted Catholic exceptionalism decades earlier.

Industrialization and urbanization increasingly fractured the population of Lower Canada, challenging the ultramontane zeal during the late nineteenth century.¹⁵ *Les Canadiens* faced a mounting concern over the corrosive threats of cultural dilution and Anglo-assimilation. Irish Catholics, while co-religionists and fellow travelers in British oppression, nevertheless also posed a clear and present danger to Francophone norms. Particularly in Montréal, the Irish established a minority presence substantial enough to cause concern among *Canadien* “nativists.” Simultaneously, waves of French Canadian emigration to the United States—particularly New England—in the decades following the American Civil War exacerbated the situation, as “Little Canadas” blossomed in industrial hubs such as Manchester, Fall River, and Lowell. The pressures of English ascendancy, the lure of The City, and the loss of a *Canadien* agrarian identity to the manifold trappings of urban vice combined with the gravitational pull of American-style secular union organizing to threaten clerical authority in both the social and political spheres. This perceived threat to the French Catholic way of life in early-twentieth-century Québec spawned a self-conscious retrenchment among traditionalist *Canadiens*—particularly as administrated by the clerical hierarchy, who had dominated the first generation of post-Confederation provincial history.

The closing decades of the nineteenth century saw a “veritable exodus” of *Canadiens* from the province of Québec to Louisiana, New England, and *L’Acadie*. The militant secessionism of the Louis Riel affair had soured Francophones to westward relocation, leaving the east coast a more desirable migratory option for those looking to escape to more

14. Cf. David Martin, *A General Theory of Secularization* (New York: Harper & Row, 1978).

15. Terence J. Fay, *A History of Canadian Catholics: Gallicanism, Romanism, and Canadianism* (Montréal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2002), 81. Cf. Jay Dolan, *The American Catholic Experience: A History from Colonial Times to the Present* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1985), 436; Jacques Lacoursière and Robin Philpot, *A People’s History of Quebec* (Montréal: Baraka Books, 2009), 121.

promising environs.¹⁶ Although a sagging economy and urban decay may have supplied the emigration “push,” US factory owners lent a carrot in the form of vigorous recruitment, in the hope of capitalizing on Québécois job scarcity and the *Canadien* reputation as docile laborers—a vigorous work ethic, with low compensatory expectations, and a negligible history of collective organizing.¹⁷ Québécois expatriation diluted the concentration of French within their home province, leaving those remaining even more susceptible to encroachment from Protestant proselytism and assimilative pressure. Furthermore, émigré *Canadiens* were profoundly at risk without proper support and infrastructure from their native community:

At first the Church was bitterly opposed to the movement. It saw its children being carried off into a Protestant and alien atmosphere where doubtless they would be lost to the fold. Within a few years, however, the priesthood began to shift its point of view. A few self-sacrificing *cures* had followed their flocks and had succeeded in keeping them together. Why should not a new province be added to French Catholicism? From despair and doubt the Church came almost to rejoice and to believe that the migration of its people was taking the form of the stronghold of Puritanism. They were engaged upon a crusade, and the prize was no less than the eventual Gallicanization [“Frenchification”] of New England.¹⁸ It should be noted that any oppression on the part of the Church in Quebec was definitely not a cause of the exodus. Catholicism in that province is a democratic (or at least popular) religion.¹⁹

It is not remarkable that those left behind would interpret this defection pessimistically, both as a rationalization for being abandoned, and a method of propaganda to dam the flood. The triumphalist, itinerant Québécois spirit drew on an earlier French biblical interpretation of their New World colonial enterprise, and a conviction that the French apostolic commission remained unfulfilled. This transplant vision was at least intermittently successful in New England, if falling somewhat short of its grandiose evangelical plans—the Québécois were themselves largely amalgamated into the teeming cornucopia of ethnically segregated American immigrant

16. Lacoursière and Philpot, *A People's History of Quebec*, 121.

17. A. R. M. Lower, “New France in New England,” *The New England Quarterly* 2:2 (April 1929): 284.

18. N.b. The use of the word “Gallicanization” here is a reference to French ethnic identity, and not to ecclesiastical collegiality among Catholic bishops, as it is in the rest of the chapter.

19. Lower, “New France in New England,” 285.

Catholicism.²⁰ Among Québécois on both sides of the border, the goal of liberation from Anglo-Protestant bondage was conceptualized in terms of socio-economic independence, political self-determination, cultural preservation, and civil rights.

While English cultural and economic domination was facilitated by political conquest, American influence from the south was in some ways even more insidious. The weekly *La Vérité*, published under the stewardship of Jules-Paul Tardivel (1851-1905), a Québécois transplant, originally hailing from Kentucky, voiced some of the more rabid allegations regarding the influence of American culture. *La Vérité* was a leading organ of reactionary conservative politics and ultramontane Catholicism, having acquired an air of respectability on account of its affiliation with Québec's archbishop and Canada's first cardinal, Elzéar-Alexandre Taschereau. *La Vérité* maintained the strong conviction that American culture bolstered a rampant spirit of materialism, crime, divorce, immoral gender politics, secular education, and frivolity.²¹ Tardivel campaigned with Taschereau against the Knights of Labor, a fraternal organization that the Holy See condemned in 1884 as an illicit, Masonic-like secret society, largely due to the archbishop's zealous campaigning. As reported in Taschereau's spring 1887 letter to his clergy, informing them of their duty to solicit penance from the Knights' Catholic membership, sacramental extortion was prescribed in order to extract their flock from the K of L:

In September 1884, the Holy See, consulted by me on the society of the knights of labor [*sic*], condemned it under pain of grievous sin, and charged the Bishops to deter their diocesans therefrom. . .

In consequence, I authorize the confessors of this diocese to absolve the knights of labor [*sic*], on the following conditions, which it is your bounden duty to explain to them, and to make them observe:

20. Lower, "New France in New England," 294–295.

21. Pierre Savard, *Jules-Paul Tardivel, la France et les États-Unis: 1851–1905* (Québec: Les presses de l'Université Laval, 1967), 207.

1. That they confess and sincerely repent the grievous sin, which they committed by not obeying the decree of September 1884;

2. That they be ready to abandon this society, so soon as the Holy See shall ordain it;

3. That they sincerely and explicitly promise absolutely to avoid all that may either favor masonic and other condemned, [*sic*] societies, or violate the laws either of justice, charity or of the state;

4. That they abstain from every promise and from every oath, by which they would bind themselves either to obey blindly all the orders of the directors of the society, or keep absolute secrecy even towards lawful authorities.

In behalf of those penitents only, and by virtue of an indult, I prolong the time of the paschal communion until the feast of the Ascension inclusively.²²

The Knights narrowly escaped universal condemnation as a secret society by Pope Leo XIII through the intervention of Baltimore's archbishop James Gibbons, who made a direct plea to the Holy Father when he visited Rome to receive his cardinal's hat in 1887.²³ As the Knights gained traction in Québec, Tardivel openly excoriated Gibbons. Although the fraternity managed to steer clear of excommunication, the controversy sparked by New York's temporarily anathematized progressive Edward McGlynn (1837–1900)—a supporter of Henry George's "single tax" collective land rights philosophy—furthered Tardivel's suspicions that American Catholicism was irredeemably toxic.²⁴

On a more grassroots level, spiritual self-empowerment was nurtured by clerically-dominated Catholic youth groups, most notably *L'Action*

22. Elzéar-Alexandre Taschereau, "Circular Letter to the Clergy," No. 154 (5 April 1887) [Seminary of Quebec Library; Ottawa – Canadian Institute for Historical Microreproductions, 1986], accessed 25 January, 2013,

http://ia601207.us.archive.org/19/items/cihm_55919/cihm_55919.pdf.

23. "Cardinal Gibbons' Defense of the Knights of Labor, 20 February 1887," in *Documents of American Catholic History*, ed. John Tracy Ellis (Milwaukee, WI: Bruce Publishing Company, 1962), 464, 471; Henry J. Browne. *The Catholic Church and the Knights of Labor* (New York: Arno Press, 1949, 1976), 182–274.

24. Savard, *Jules-Paul Tardivel*, 220.

catholique, which was later derided by a disillusioned Lacouture for its emphasis on the social at the expense of the interior—a criticism he also applied to the more radical Catholic Worker movement, in some ways his own spiritual progeny.²⁵ Michael Gauvreau has argued that the apparently sudden socio-political transformation of the Quiet Revolution was a direct result of socio-spiritual reforms in the '30s, rather than being purely the result of “inevitable” secular forces, and had deep roots within the Catholic community itself. By inspiring a triumphalist revivalism among a generation of *Canadien* adolescents, predominantly under the auspices of Catholic Action, the Church unwittingly planted the seeds for its own demise. An ethic of spiritual heroism endowed Québécois youth with a disgust for Christian mediocrity perceived in their immediate elders.²⁶ Gauvreau contends that the unique blend of personalism that evolved in Québec during this period was critical in fostering a sense of “spiritual revolution,” which manifested politically some decades later in a massive exodus towards secularism. By liberating themselves from their filial tradition, post-war *Canadiens* resuscitated a muscular spiritual vocation, which eventually, ironically enough, persisted even decades later, when clerical Catholicism was deemed archaic. This backdrop of spiritual renewal, Christian perfectionism, and social engagement laid the foundation for Lacouture’s alternate, maximalist “return to the Gospel”—his suppression prefigured the tidal shift that manifested more explicitly some decades later.

As a work of historical revision, Gauvreau’s study looks for alternate sources of cultural transformation, and is oriented towards a more lay-focused account of *Canadien* Catholicism, rather than restricting his research to the Church hierarchy and the neoconservative political regime

25. E.-Martin Meunier and Jean-Philippe Warren, *Sortir de la “Grande noirceur”: L’horizon “personnaliste” de la Révolution tranquille* (Sillery, QC: Les Éditions du Septentrion, 2002), 33.

26. Gauvreau, *The Catholic Origins of Quebec’s Quiet Revolution*, 32: “The most common indictment of old-style Catholicism was that its spiritual character was flawed because it equated salvation with the mere performance of the duties of individual piety and observance of a restrictive moral code, and thus presented the Church as accessible only to certain elect individuals who were able to conform to these moral imperatives, a view that hobbled its ability to function in a modern world where collective effort and purpose alone would assure the intersection of Catholicism with all facets of human existence.”

of Maurice Duplessis, according to historiographic custom.²⁷ Primarily under the auspices of Catholic Action, young Catholics became acclimated to a more democratic form of community organizing and balked at the clerical retrenchment that marked post-war Québec, which they saw as needlessly authoritarian and spiritually vapid. By the late 1930s, “François Hertel” (otherwise known as Rodolphe Dubé, SJ, an iconic schoolteacher at Montréal’s prestigious Collège Jean-de-Brébeuf and mentor to Pierre Elliott Trudeau) was giving voice to a maximalist spirit of “rupture” that inspired young Catholics who towed their spiritual formation in Catholic Action into their adult lives as labour organizers and politicians:

Justice and charity cannot truly rule until those who preach and strive for them intend, first and foremost, to become saints themselves, in order to convince others of the overwhelming need for personal sanctification.

All this is very austere, no? Yes! Young people, a truly Catholic life, a life that excludes camouflage, is an austere life.

If you feel yourself weak, lacking courage, lacking enthusiasm, address yourself to Him who gives energy, to the strength of God. If you don’t want to pray, suffer, fight...you are to be pitied. Because there is nothing more noble in this world than to continually pick oneself up on the rocky, steep path that leads to holiness.²⁸

The salvation of our society, of our nation, of our providential destiny itself, depends on keeping spiritual values—*supernatural* values—in the foreground of our consideration of individuals, and consequently, of society.²⁹

Over against what was perceived as holistic mediocrity among their immediate forebears, disciples of Hertel and Groulx demanded a fresh *modus operandi* that was both spiritually *and* politically vibrant. Gauvreau’s basic thesis is that it was precisely the tone of Catholic revivalism in Québec during the 1930s that, paradoxically enough, laid the groundwork for the rampant secularization that renovated the socio-political climate of the

27. Gauvreau, *The Catholic Origins of Quebec’s Quiet Revolution*, 7.

28. François Hertel, *Leur Inquiétude* (Montréal: Éditions Jeunesse, 1936), 235.

29. Hertel, *Leur Inquiétude*, 237.

'60s, embodied by both Trudeau and Lévesque.³⁰ This period sustained a corporate messianic self-awareness, however secularized and unfamiliar to traditionalists, which sat on the cusp of a tectonic shift that stimulated socio-political renewal in Québec. Although *Canadien* revivalists depicted themselves as divinely protected refugees of the French Revolution, within just three decades, many would come to view the traditional vice grip of clericalism as not only a socio-economic impediment, but also one that limited cultural progress and freedom of conscience—a concern that also animated the personalist reforms promulgated in Vatican II. However, while the proactive end of this progression marked a distinct shift within the *Canadien* Catholic psyche, the Lacouture controversy marked a point of severance with tradition.

Some commentators have argued that Gauvreau's narrative artificially overemphasizes the polarities between "religious" and "secular" dimensions of Québécois society, while minimizing creative cultural aspects of the Quiet Revolution that staved off the creeping threat of both Anglo-Canadian and American influences.³¹ Gregory Baum's writing on the period has emphasized the effervescent irruption that this period represented in Québécois history, which had staved off the socio-economic threat of "Anglo capital" and political absorption, which was facilitated by Duplessis' leadership during "The Great Darkness," despite his self-proclaimed nationalism.³² Catholicism's effective disestablishment in the 1960s opened up avenues for self-empowerment, particularly among lay "elites," who looked forward to increased opportunities for industrial and cultural modernization, but, more fundamentally, personal agency.³³ For those Catholics who

30. Cf. Nemni and Nemni, *Young Trudeau*, 64–65.

31. Matthew Hayday, review of *The Catholic Origins of Quebec's Quiet Revolution, 1931–1970* by Michael Gauvreau, *Historical Studies* 73 (2007): 111–114; Gregory Baum, review of *The Catholic Origins of Quebec's Quiet Revolution, 1931–1970*, *The Catholic Historical Review* 91:1 (January 2007): 217–218.

32. Gregory Baum, "Catholicism and Secularization in Quebec," *Cross Currents* 36:4 (1 December 1986): 438: "With the fall of Duplessis party and the election of a liberal government on June 22, 1960...[w]hat too place was the modernization of Quebec society... These changes were accompanied by an extraordinary popular enthusiasm, a new pride in being French Canadian, and an outburst of cultural creativity."

33. Baum, "Catholicism and Secularization in Quebec," 441: "The role of the Church in this historical context is not without ambiguity. On the one hand, the creation of a powerful Catholic ideology helped the people to withstand assimilation and decline; it created for them

remained, the spirit of Vatican II provided an innovative framework within which the *Canadien* Church could re-conceptualize its new position as a denomination, rather than the unbending, normative spiritual authority. The reality—even mutual benefit—of pluralism in post-Revolutionary Québec marked the coming of age of that trend of personalism that prevailed, almost simultaneously, within the confines of Vatican II's *aggiornamento*, which flung open the windows of the Church.

Onésime Lacouture was born on April 13, 1881, some forty-five miles northeast of Montréal. His father, Xavier, a widower who married twice, had twenty-one children in total, of which Onésime was the second youngest.³⁴ When Onésime was six years old, the entire brood joined the Francophone exodus to New England and immigrated to the United States—first to Woonsocket, Rhode Island, and one year later to what is now Wayland, Massachusetts.³⁵ Following his high school graduation, in 1900, Onésime returned to Québec to enroll in the College of the Assumption, where he was introduced to the Society of Jesus. The Jesuit reputation for scholastic excellence and missionary frontier dramatics exerted an irresistible pull on the budding seminarian. Following his entry into the Society, Lacouture immersed himself in a period of intense philosophical study and spiritual direction at St. Andrew-on-the-Hudson, the scholasticate of the recently amalgamated Maryland and New York Provinces in Poughkeepsie (today more properly known as the campus of the Culinary Institute of America). When the time came for his regency, a period of on-the-job professional training and ongoing vocational discernment, Lacouture's interest had piqued at the prospect of a teaching opportunity at a newly-opened Jesuit university in Tokyo. However, his provincial thwarted his zealous aspirations when he saw it fit to send him, rather unwillingly, into the remote, frigid

an independent cultural identity that now serves as resource for political struggle.... In a certain sense, the whole people was in search of a new, more contemporary self-image and was the carrier of the Quiet Revolution."

34. Onésime Lacouture, SJ, *Mon séjour en Alaska* (Québec: Éditions Scivias, 1998), 12. Cf. Karl Strauch, *La Thème de la "folie de la Croix" dans l'œuvre du Père Onésime Lacouture [1881-1951]* (Montréal: Cahiers Scivias, 1998), 22. Strauch seems to misread Lacouture's account, and claims that he was the ninth of Xavier's first ten children. Additionally he states that Xavier only had eleven children in total.

35. Lacouture, *Mon séjour en Alaska*, 13.

wilderness of the Alaskan tundra, which Lacouture would come to call his “white desert.”

Throughout his adult life, Lacouture appears to have maintained a remarkably consistent supernaturalist worldview. Although he wavered slightly in his early years in the Society as to the exact nature of his priestly vocation, he appears to have virtually never questioned that he did, in fact, have one. Once his Japanese fantasy evaporated into thin air, Lacouture quickly pivoted and embraced his harsh assignment, modelling himself on perennial Jesuit favourite, the itinerant saint Francis Xavier. The mania he experienced upon being commissioned soon turned to dread and extreme malaise during his first months at the Holy Cross Mission, along the coast of the Bering Sea. Feeling isolated, unappreciated, and (as it were) claustrophobic, Lacouture sank into a deep depression. However, it was the intensification of his solitude in the wilderness that served as the locus for his radical spiritual conversion.

On account of having missed an annual community retreat due to work, Lacouture received permission for a solitary retreat. Although he would return to his normal residence in the evenings, Lacouture spent days isolated in the forest wilderness, uninterrupted by missionary labour, or social obligations. Armed with high spiritual expectations, a romantic supernatural imagination, and a copy of Ignatius’ *Exercises*, Lacouture was invigorated by these days spent in prayer and meditation under the open sky, or huddled under some natural shelter or snowdrift along the banks of a nearby lake. The conditions were intimidating, and Lacouture expected that malevolent forces might be conspiring to derail his progress in prayer. Through a series of mystical revelations, Lacouture came to “know many things”—which he later interpreted as an analogue to St. Ignatius’ experiences at Manresa. He suddenly found himself living on the supernatural plane. It was this sequence of transmissions that he later credited as his primary formation in the Christian spiritual life, superseding any formal training from his order:

Little by little a light dawned in my soul, and I began to see the divine side of human affairs. I understood that the evil was only in my twisted pagan spirit which judged everything solely from the point of view of this world, while God does all in view of the next.

This was a revelation for me: I began to love my immense solitude which spoke to me of God and of eternity. Like a bird freed from its cage, my spirit soared joyously in the serene regions of that other realm which is more perfect than the visible world. . . The face of the earth was renewed for me: my pains and my sorrows vanished and I learned to treasure that which I had despised, and to despise that which I had treasured. I began to love my poor cabin, my desert of snow, and my long solitary evenings. The splendid Aurora Borealis was just a feeble sample of the divine emanations that God poured into my soul.³⁶

Lacouture's arctic transfiguration in the sparse wilds was foundational in the development of both his spiritual rigor and his anti-intellectual distaste for institutional mediation and mainstream tepidity.³⁷ This marked a pivot-point in his life trajectory, diverting him from a more conventional life as an academic, parish priest, or socially-conscious public intellectual, and towards his vocation as an evangelist.³⁸ The practical experience of God that he had acquired now superseded the abstraction and theory that consumed his formation studies, and, he believed, persisted among his Jesuit brethren.³⁹

Although he essentially stowed away on a ship heading back to civilization in order to avoid an additional year at the mission, Lacouture almost instantaneously integrated his Alaskan sojourn into a narrative of his calling to renew authentic, "primitive" Christianity. The young seminarian who now dubbed himself "God's scalpel" seems to have suffered through what remained of his theological studies, and was ordained to the priesthood in 1916. After a stint as a military chaplain in Europe and India, Lacouture eventually made his way back to Québec, and began his ministry as a semi-itinerant circuit preacher. Lacouture's ten-day silent retreats were essentially a redaction of the *Exercises*, tailored to conform to his revelations in Alaska. It was humbly enough received at the beginning, with a grand total of four participants the first time around in 1931. Nonetheless, as Lacouture continued to plug away, his client base began to swell—his

36. Lacouture, *Mon séjour en Alaska*, 4–5.

37. Lacouture, *Mon séjour en Alaska*, 98–99.

38. Lacouture, *Mon séjour en Alaska*, 131.

39. Lacouture, *Mon séjour en Alaska*, 121.

own statistics indicate that his retreat participants numbered close to three thousand (2,932), with many returning for repeat performances.⁴⁰

Lacouture preached a rigid asceticism—largely inspired by the writings of St. John of the Cross—as part of a more tectonic project of resuscitating traditional *Canadien* spirituality, which he saw being threatened by the then-ascendant social Catholicism that emerged as a side-effect of Québec’s somewhat tardy entrance into the urban-industrial world. Lacouture’s “doctrine” was self-consciously countercultural, with an uncompromising focus on the supreme dominion of God, over against any and all interpersonal and socio-economic concerns. Avarice, desire for cosmopolitan “respectability,” apparently innocuous or even principled social organizing runs the risk of moral hazard, by virtue of their self-referential intention, which express and deepen the soul’s disordered affections. Although Catholic moral theology traditionally argues for the objective sinfulness of particular actions, Lacouture located the spiritual combat in the intention—allowing that *any* activity might be an occasion for sin, depending on what transpired below the surface:

It is the intentions that form the scene of the battle between good and evil angels, between grace and nature, between God and man...and this is the most neglected aspect of all theology. Theology manuals barely mention the question of motives, and professors never discuss the question in class...It is quite ignored by priests, sparsely employed, as one can see by the absolute ignorance of the faithful on the topic of difference between natural and supernatural motives. Above all, they have never heard of their radical opposition in the work of salvation.

We Christians know that, sometimes, we must renounce some things in our lives—like during Lent, when we give up dessert, abstain from dancing, etc.... But who knows how to CONQUER ONESELF like the saints, and even more so,

40. Anselme Longpré, *Un mouvement spirituel au Québec (1931-1962): Un retour à l'Évangile* (Montréal: Fides, 1976), 18. It should be noted that John Hugo misrepresents Lacouture’s statistics in *Your Ways Are Not My Ways* (vol. 1, p. 3), apparently based on a faulty reading of Longpré’s text, which he self-admittedly leans heavily on for historical background. Hugo claims that 2,932 clergy participated once, while 2,478 repeated (which, either way, is off by ten); Longpré’s actual appendix states that a total of 2,932 individuals went on the retreat, with a collective of 2,468 total repeat performances (made up of the original 2,932). The statistics do not indicate how many people returned how many times, just that there were 2,468 repeat participations during the nine years.

like Jesus? Where are the priests who know this? Where are those who can preach it, for example, in a retreat to cloistered religious who profess strict renunciation?

... This is his little kingdom, where he uses all his natural motives for his own satisfaction, praise, and service. A natural motive is directed towards this small sample of God! A supernatural motive is directed towards God in Heaven.

... To conquer ourselves, therefore, is to slaughter something of our little god on a daily basis; it's to wage a war to the death with him EVERY DAY!⁴¹

Along with John of the Cross, the Desert Fathers, and other contemplative luminaries, Lacouture drew inspiration from Christ's counsel to vigorously safeguard humility and tend to our motivations. Lacouture never argued that socio-political engagement is *categorically* iniquitous; rather, he argued that it manifests a disordered internal disposition—an addiction to “the world” that necessarily relegates supernatural concerns to the sidelines. Nevertheless, Lacouture emphasized the interiority of self-mortification—its secrecy—over against exterior practices.⁴² In his system, self-mortification was a process engaged in for the purpose of annihilating what he called our inner “pagan.” “Pagan” is a term that Lacouture used as code for base sensuality and materialism. Very rarely, if ever, was Lacouture talking about *actual* pagans—it was a purely pejorative term in his usage. In Lacouture nomenclature, “the pagan” remains attached to things of the flesh, at the expense of the divine. Lacouture was not implying that there is actually some sort of demon possession occurring in this instance; rather, he discussed “the pagan in us” as that aspect of the soul that delights in “the world”—which Lacouture believed must be stifled, indeed, *eradicated*. Lacouture's ascetic program, although apparently restrictive, was actually aimed at liberating Christians from bondage to the lower aspects of the soul.

41. Onésime Lacouture, SJ, *Mes retraites, première série: Doctrine Surnaturelle pour se défaire de toute mentalité païenne* (Québec: Éditions Scivias, 1998), 16-7.

42. Cf. Mt. 6:5-8: “When you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, who love to stand and pray in the synagogues and on street corners so that others may see them. Amen, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you pray, go to your inner room, close the door, and pray to your Father in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will repay you. In praying, do not babble like the pagans, who think that they will be heard because of their many words. Do not be like them. Your Father knows what you need before you ask him.”

Although the retreat was never actually *restricted* to priests, they were Lacouture's ideal target audience. His retreat's mission was to inoculate the clergy from the creeping mediocrity that infected *Canadien* morals. He believed the loss of a pious, rural, agrarian lifestyle among the native Québécois to be rooted in clerical corruption, which left the laity ill-equipped to resist the onslaught of Anglo-industrialist values. In Lacouture's mind, this was evinced by clerical sanction of "frivolous" activities on church grounds, such as youth sports and social gatherings (including, as it were, *bingo*). The proliferation of Catholic infrastructure in the face of growing secularism and Protestant hegemony, as in the United States, allowed Québécois Catholics to insulate themselves against spiritual-cultural threats by providing a complex social matrix that was culturally "pure" and empowered clerical oversight. However, Lacouture saw this as precisely a symptom that the "pagan spirit" had already compromised the Catholic psyche. His rigorist ethics drew accusations of a whole cornucopia of heresies (some of which seem mutually-exclusive): Pelagianism; Manichaeism; crypto-Calvinism; and, most commonly, Jansenism.⁴³

For someone frequently charged with being a Jansenist heresiarch, Lacouture's writings are relatively sparse in regard to Augustine citations and formal references. Ignatius of Loyola appears throughout—particularly on the subject of ordered affections and supernatural motives—which is exactly what one would expect, given the central position of the *Exercises* in framing Lacouture's retreat.⁴⁴ Although he never formulated it systematically, Lacouture foreshadowed the contemporary distinction between "Ignatian" and "Jesuit" modes of spirituality—implicitly holding a firm fidelity to the founding charism of the Society's founders over against its perceived subsequent decline.⁴⁵ Whatever the considerable obstacles Lacouture had with his order, he never seems to have flinched in his devotion to his Jesuit Fathers. Francis Xavier, Lacouture's original archetypal saint from his days as an aspiring missionary, continued to be a model of the heroic Christian life. Additionally, Lacouture regularly cited Thomas Aquinas—the modern

43. Roland Fournier, PSS, "Grâce et Nature," *Le Séminaire* (15 August 1941): 145, n. 8.

44. Cf. Lacouture, *Mes Retraites, première série*, 37.

45. Ronald Modras, "The Spiritual Humanism of the Jesuits," in *An Ignatian Spirituality Reader: Contemporary Writings on St. Ignatius of Loyola, the Spiritual Exercises, Discernment, and More*, ed. George W. Traub, SJ. (Chicago: Loyola Press, 2008), 4–15.

era's ultimate theological trump card—lending an air of doctrinal orthodoxy to his teachings.⁴⁶ Nevertheless, Lacouture's bedrock understanding of “paganism” as a kind of interior, affective disorder, and his strict moral dichotomies evinced a strong absorption of classic Augustinian concepts, most systematically treated in the *City of God*:

We see then that the two cities were created by two kinds of love: the earthly city was created by self-love reaching the point of contempt for God, the Heavenly City by the love of God carried as far as contempt for self. In fact, the earthly city glories in itself, the Heavenly City glories in the Lord. The former looks for glory from men, the latter finds its highest glory in God, the witness of a good conscience. The earthly lifts up its head in its own glory, the Heavenly City says to its God; “My glory; you lift up my head.” In the former, the lust for domination lords it over its princes as over the nations it subjugates; in the other both those put in authority and those subject to them serve one another in love, the rulers by their counsel, the subjects by obedience. The one city loves its own strength shown in its powerful leaders; the other says to its God, “I will love you, my Lord, my strength.”⁴⁷

Augustine's “City of God” and “City of Man,” while allowing for some variation outside the strict confines of the Catholic Church—echoed in more contemporary theological terms such as “anonymous Christianity” and “implicit desire”—were largely defined by formal religious affiliation. However, Augustine's own more existential treatment of ethical topics such as concupiscence, continence, and charity prefigured Onésime Lacouture's consideration of the moral life, and coloured his vision of the dangers of contemporary forms of idolatry. Just as virtue can be developed by vigilant discipline, the root sin of self-absorption is cultivated over time into a *habitus*, a disposition towards sin. Drawing heavily on John of the Cross's hierarchy of affections—a hallmark feature of Augustinian thought—Lacouture vigilantly scrutinized all manner of phenomena as potential sources of ego-attachment that would undermine its fidelity to God's “supreme dominion.” Thus, while affirming the goodness of all creation “*in se*,” Lacouturites never tired of underlining their oppressive character as

46. Pope Leo XIII, *Aeterni Patris* (August 1879), http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/leo_xiii/encyclicals/documents/hf_l-xiii_enc_04081879_aeterni-patris_en.html

47. Augustine of Hippo, *The City of God*, book XIV, chapter 28, trans. Henry Bettenson (New York: Penguin Putnam, Inc., 1972), 593.

experienced “*in nobis*”—a distinction that corresponded to their disdain for abstract intellectual theology at the expense of the practical.⁴⁸

Lacouture’s decidedly immoderate supernatural imagination conceptualized his “mission” in cosmic terms as a battle between Good and Evil. Characteristically, his deeply ingrained iconoclasm paired with Lacouture’s semi-apocalyptic worldview, prompting him to theorize—without any overt sense of irony—that disapproving diocesan and Jesuit superiors were, in fact, demonic emissaries of Satan, conscripted to malevolently undermine his holy mission. His arch-apologist and inheritor of the retreat’s mantle, Pittsburgh’s diocesan priest John Hugo, channeled Lacouture’s own supernatural conspiratorial hypotheses:

Throughout this time of increasing success there had been also increasing opposition. The devil could not tolerate such work as this! To turn priests to the spiritual life would undo all his work! And so, being the father of lies, he found no difficulty in circulating numerous lies about these retreats and the many who preached them. And there were many who were ready to believe these lies, even among superiors, without examination. The edifying conduct of all these priests on retreat, the edifying lives that they lived afterwards at their homes, were a reproach to many of the clergy. To the Jesuits also they were a reproach; not only because of the tepid among them, but also because the sensational success of this preacher, so plainly lacking in *finish*, was apt to cause questioning glances to be directed at their other more skillful teachers. Surely such success can be explained only in terms of black magic!⁴⁹

Lacouture’s constitutional inability to let well-enough alone precipitated a formal censure, wherein he was forcibly silenced and circulated among western Jesuit provinces, which he dubbed his “exile.” Although he managed to leak a few subsequent communiqués under the essentially unbelievable guise of private interpersonal correspondences, Lacouture’s public ministry was effectively shut down by 1940—Lacouture continued to protest privately about this until his death. However, “Lacouturisme” had a colourful future south of the border, piloted by his intractable devotee John Hugo (1911–1985).

48. Lacouture, *Mes Retraites, première série*, 408.

49. John J. Hugo, *Your Ways Are Not My Ways, Volume 1* (Pittsburgh, PA: Encounter with Silence, 1986), 197–198.

While Lacouture appealed on a grassroots level to the province's vowed religious, his suppression indicated a normative ecclesiastical shift towards the modern. In the Lacouturite narrative, whatever interior opposition may have impeded his spiritual progress had now been supplanted by the malevolent machinations of a "paganized" institutional hierarchy. In the electric ferment of the Lacouturite supernatural imagination, skepticism and calls for moderation were interpreted as sadistic persecution, likened to the *Blitzkrieg*, Spanish Inquisition, Holocaust, and Passion of Christ.⁵⁰ Critics, whom Lacouture stigmatized as "Pharisees" for their allegedly sterile formalism, megalomania, and spiritual tepidity, somewhat understandably fretted over the retreat theology's popularity among clerical greenhorns. Roland Fournier, a Sulpician theologian at Montréal's *Grand Séminaire*, launched the first public volley, which would be taken up in earnest as the retreat migrated southward under the stewardship of John Hugo.⁵¹ However, by this time, the whole thing was rather moot, as the controversy—at least its Québécois iteration—had already been sorted through covert backdoor dealing, with Lacouture forcibly relocated to more temperate environs. His first stop: Santa Barbara, California—not exactly the most bleak of outposts, although Lacouture's ministerial abilities had been crippled. Forbidden from giving retreats, publishing, or preaching openly, Lacouture's public life was essentially terminated. He subsequently was circulated to Los Angeles, Alberta, and finally back east to the St. Régis Mission, his final resting place.

At the time of his death, Onésime Lacouture's once-bright flame had largely petered out in Québec, although a small fan base persisted below the radar. The combined efforts of antagonistic archdiocesan and Jesuit superiors coupled with academic and pastoral authorities in derailing the spread of Lacouture's maximalist retreat doctrine—unsystematically coordinated as it was. Without Lacouture's proximity—either physical or remote—to stoke his personality cult, the substance of the retreat lacked endurance. Retrospectively, its popular failure seems somewhat inevitable, and one must wonder what Lacouture would have done without opposition stoking his countercultural sense of mission. The tide of Québécois Catholicism—even of the triumphalist, crusading sort that viewed itself as leading the vanguard in defending against cultural Anglo-assimilation—represented

50. Lacouture (11 May 1941) in Longpré, *Un mouvement spirituel au Québec*, 53.

51. Fournier, "Grâce et Nature," 140–151.

a fundamentally different conception of human nature, and the nature of authentic liberation. For his part, Lacouture never ceased quixotically pressing for his rehabilitation. As late as 1944, he petitioned the newly minted Jesuit Superior General, Norbert de Boynes, seemingly hoping that the recent Allied deliverance of Rome might leave him favourably disposed.⁵² His letter is saturated with adulation and cosmic conspiracy theories—such as had coloured his traditional self-depiction as a persecuted martyr. There is no indication that de Boynes responded to his appeal, and Lacouture’s formal restoration remained out of reach in perpetuity.

Onésime Lacouture’s devoted following languished outside of his presence in Québec, and his *Canadien* flock proved insufficiently robust to fend off the onslaught of modernism. Even though his primary opponents were no left wing radicals or secularizing progressives, their antipathy to his extreme ascetic reforms marked a distinct shift in the mainstream ethical positions of Catholic orthodoxy in Québec. The mainstream Francophone brand of revivalism that swept through *Canadien* cultural retrenchment fused a rigorous Catholic spirituality with practical socio-economic concerns informed by the signs of the times and practical necessities. The uncompromising doctrine of the “Folly of the Cross” that Lacouture peddled contrasted with the itself-countercultural position that the Church was digging in opposition to the looming tide of Anglo-Protestantism. At the close of his final retreat, prior to Lacouture’s sun-drenched “exile,” he managed to fire one, typically volatile, parting shot across the bow of Catholic Québec that proved prophetic:

People call me crazy, nobody wants to believe me, but I tell you this, even though I know this may be the last time I speak publicly: your churches are filled now—in twenty-five years, they will be empty and serve as bingo halls! The seminaries and novitiates overflow with students; in twenty-five years, they will all be closed! Because of you priests, through your laziness and negligence, you who’d rather smoke your pipes on the balcony, and ride around in Chryslers than teach the Catechism in schools: in twenty-five years, all the doors to these schools will be shut because of you religious; instead of living evangelically, you live “like the pagans!” . . . In twenty-five years, you will be expelled from the schools and hospitals!⁵³

52. Lacouture to de Boynes (AJC [BO-0167-1,3], 6 June 1944).

53. Lacouture, quoted in Longpré, *Un mouvement spirituel au Québec*, 12–13. This “prophecy” was given at Lacouture’s final retreat, prior to his “exile” in 1939.

In a different context, Lacouture's self-conscious anti-modernism would have played better, and circumvented the rather unbecoming internal hysterics that largely flew below the public's radar. A generation of elite *Canadien* youth evolved into powerful spheres of influence, eventually shedding their clerical framework and eradicating Québec's bulwark of clerical infrastructure during the Quiet Revolution. The suppression of Onésime Lacouture's maximalist spirituality prefigured the entrance of the Church into the cosmopolitan world of twentieth-century industrialism. His extreme, if short-lived, popularity and the corresponding gravity with which he was dealt (deservedly or not) spoke to the liminality of post-Depression Québec.

The respective suppressions of Onésime Lacouture and Leonard Feeney spoke to the distinct issues at play as Catholicism negotiated its newfound embrace of modernity. While Feeneyites championed the ultraorthodox position of *extra Ecclesiam nulla salus*, Lacouturites assailed "paganism" in its more subtle forms, *within* the Church. While the "Boston Heresy Case" addressed US institutional boundary maintenance, and prefigured the Second Vatican Council's ecumenical shift, the Lacouture affair symbolized a redefinition of Québécois plausibility structures in a pluralistic society.⁵⁴ While Lacouture's enigmatic brand of asceticism may have been perennially countercultural, its initial appeal—and thus the cause for its suppression—evinced a prevailing cultural anxiety about *Canadien* social "progress." Ironically, although Lacouturisme sputtered in its home province, it had more enduring legs further south, and eventually morphed into spiritual fodder for the Catholic Worker movement—arguably the United States' most radical expression of praxis-based liberation theology. Dorothy Day's permutation of the retreat's theology fused the extreme self-abnegation of Lacouturite asceticism with an immersion-based spirituality of voluntary poverty and political agitation—which Lacouture himself found honourable but also disconcertingly temporal.⁵⁵ Reflecting back on her first encounter with Lacouture theology, Day gushed that it was like "hearing the gospel for the first time."⁵⁶ Subsequently, she became a great evangelist

54. Cf. Peter L. Berger, *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1967).

55. John J. Hugo interviewed by Miller in Pittsburgh, 1976 (DD-CW [W-9, Box 2, Folder 2]).

56. Dorothy Day, *The Long Loneliness*, (New York: Harper, 1952), 250–251.

of the Lacouture retreat, pushing it enthusiastically upon her sometimes-unwilling extended Catholic Worker community. While Lacouture's world-denying "Sermon on the Mount theology" looked to revive "primitive" Christian visions of human nature and supernatural liberation as a response to the perceived bondage of cultural materialism, his rise spoke to the cultural anxieties of tradition in the face of an alternate, socially-engaged Catholicism that eventually broke through in the personalist, secularizing coup that was the Quiet Revolution.