

THE CATHOLIC CLERGY IN THE NORTH ATLANTIC AREA, 1763-1830: PATTERNS OF DEVIANCY

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ABSTRACT

In a very transnational fashion, priestly misbehavior is a constant feature in the primary sources dealing with the United States and British North America, including Québec, between 1763 and 1846. Rather than a catalogue of occurrences, this article briefly surveys the three main elements of such misbehavior, namely, illicit sex, immoderate drinking, and excessive avariciousness. It then suggests an interpretative grid where behavioral norms were interpreted differently whenever they were challenged by local conditions, leading to accusations of misbehavior whether these accusations reflected actual wrongdoings or not. Ethnic rivalries, different institutional traditions, conflicting political choices, and Protestant competition are the most likely candidates to populate such a large framework.

KEYWORDS

Priestly misbehavior – United States – British North America – Canada.

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O CLERO CATÓLICO NA REGIÃO DO ATLÂNTICO NORTE, 1763-1830: PADRÕES DE DÉSVMIO

RESUMO

De um modo bem transnacional se apresenta o mau comportamento sacerdotal, que é uma característica constante nas principais fontes que lidam com Estados Unidos e a América do Norte britânica, incluindo Québec, entre 1763 e 1846. Em vez de um catálogo de ocorrências, este artigo examina brevemente os três principais elementos que constituem esse mau comportamento, a saber, sexo ilícito, consumo excessivo de álcool e avareza excessiva. Em seguida, sugere uma grade interpretativa em que as normas comportamentais eram interpretadas de maneira diferente sempre que eram desafiadas pelas condições locais, levando a acusações de mau comportamento, independentemente de essas acusações refletirem ou não erros reais. Rivalidades étnicas, diferentes tradições institucionais, opções políticas conflitantes e a competição protestante são os candidatos mais prováveis a preencher as lacunas de uma estrutura mais ampla.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE

Mau comportamento sacerdotal – Estados Unidos – América do Norte Britânica – Canada.

Anyone approaching the history of the early Catholic Church in North America within the larger context of the North Atlantic world in late eighteenth and early nineteenth century is confronted, first of all, by a well-established, traditional historiography, whose essence is mainly contributionist. How has my country – region, state, province, city, parish, order, community, etc. – contributed to the development of the Catholic Church and to the attainment of its final aim, i.e., the salvation of the individual soul? Or how has that bishop – priest, nun, order, parish – contributed to the fulfillment of my nation’s destiny? In early North America, the establishment and development of the Catholic Church involved on the one side the keeping of the faith among nominal Catholics, mainly of European origin, through a frustrating yet constant attempt to withdraw them from their state of sin. On the other side, this same process required the conversion of heretics and pagans, i.e., the Protestants, the native peoples, and the African slaves. Mostly written by members of the Catholic Church, whether erudite priests or lay amateur historians, these narratives tend to portray the author’s special case within a more general context in which ups and downs (or rises and falls) are invariably interpreted in an ultimately optimistic fashion, given that universal salvation must be the final outcome. Traditional biographical studies fall into this historiographical trend as they represent the contribution – social, spiritual, or both – of a particular individual within the context of his or her life and times³.

Undeniably, belonging to this traditional and contributionist historiography does not per se determine the scholarly value of any book. This historiography is dispersed among innumerable philopietistic writings. Let us not forget, for example, the excellent writings of American historians such as Jean Delanglez (1896-1949) on Louisiana and Annabelle M. Melville (1910-91) on the Early Republic, or those of the Canadian historians Lucien Campeau (1914-2003) on the Jesuits of New France and Lucien Lemieux on Lower Canada. The

3 The author wishes to thank the two anonymous referees for their very useful suggestions.

chronicles of George W. Paré (1886-1963) for Detroit or Roger Baudier (1893-1960) for Louisiana and the evidence they painstakingly collected provide yet another example, as they still are the stepping stone for new, more historiographically focused studies. At the same time we should not underestimate the intellectual influence brought onto the historiography of the Catholic Church in North America by the Second Vatican Council (1962-5) and Québec's Quiet Revolution (1960-6), together with the concurrent rise of the historiography "from the bottom up"⁴. These developments are well represented in the large-canvas works of American historians Jay P. Dolan and James J. Hennesey (1926-2001), or of Canadian historians Serge Gagnon, Terrence Murphy, and Roberto Perin. Theirs is a "look from the outside" that has erased any justification for hagiography and amateurism in Catholic historiography and has made scholarly criticism its first and foremost necessary requirement.

Within this framework, a relatively recent and felicitous development in Catholic historiography has been a new interest in women religious, a neglected category until lately except for mostly adulatory treatments either of some women of special significance or of congregational histories, usually written by a member of the same congregation. For the period covered by this chapter, this new development is well represented by Emily J. Clark's writings on the Louisiana Ursulines and by Catherine O'Donnell's and Kathleen Sprows Cummings's works on Saint Elizabeth Ann Bayley Seton (1774-1821)⁵. A more contradictory outcome has derived from a renewed interest in the native peoples and the African slaves. For a long time relegated to the

4 In the Province of Québec, the Quiet Revolution (*Révolution tranquille*) was a period of political reform which in the end favored a rapid secularization of society.

5 CLARK, Emily J. *Masterless mistresses: the New Orleans Ursulines and the development of a new world society, 1727-1834*. Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press for the Omohundro Institute of Early American History and Culture, 2007; CLARK, Emily J.; LAVEN, Mary (ed.). *Women and religion in the Atlantic Age, 1550-1900*. Farnham: Ashgate, 2013; SPROWS CUMMINGS, Kathleen. *A saint of our own: how the quest for a holy hero helped Catholics become American*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2019; O'DONNELL, Catherine. *Elizabeth Seton: American saint*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2018.

role of targets of frontier missionary activity, these communities and their members are now reinterpreted as agents of their own histories and lives⁶. Still, this shift in interest in the “missionized” and the new analysis sophistication has somehow stifled a parallel development with regard to the missionaries. Churchmen have become stilted figures within a representation of the Catholic Church as a monolithic body, mainly viewed in negative terms, whose internal mechanisms have now become unworthy of scholarly investigation. For example, a concerned reviewer of a recent article of mine, in which I dealt with the differing ways in which priests and European bureaucrats used the institute of the Tridentine marriage, recommended outright rejection, in that my piece was described as “dated, old-fashioned, even offensive” because “native perceptions [were] not treated ... on their own merits” and the piece lacked “a more robust and sympathetic consideration of native perspectives”⁷.

Curiously enough, the recent enthusiasm for Atlantic and global history have as yet failed to make a significant dent in Catholic historiography, at least for the period here examined and except for the inclusion of Rome and the Holy See in the overall picture. Developments are usually described within national or local framework – the American church, the church in the Maritimes or in the West, etc. – or in that of bilateral relations with the country of European origin, especially France, Ireland, or Scotland. These narratives imply the developments they describe were unique to, or least prevalent in, the author’s selected context. Although local variations and pragmatic solutions must be taken into due account, I have tried elsewhere to show the interconnections which were present in the early North

6 LITTLE, Ann M. *The many captivities of Esther Wheelwright*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016. This book is a recent example of how a single narrative can incorporate the perspective of a church leader, who was also a woman religious, and the experience of native culture.

7 CODIGNOLA, Luca. The issue of Tridentine marriage in a composite North Atlantic world: doctrinal strictures vs. loose practices, 1607-1738. *Journal of Early American History*, Leiden, v. 5, n. 3, p. 201-270, 2015 (the other four reviewers did not express the same concerns).

Atlantic Church and the role of conservatism as a fundamental point of reference for the people involved⁸.

In this article I will outline yet another element that for the period here under scrutiny is common to all regions in the North Atlantic world, one that springs up as a constant feature from the primary sources wherever we look. This element is priestly misbehavior. In his book on Catholic expansion into the American West in the Early Republic, American historian John R. Dichtl believes that the presence of numerous “scandalous renegade priests” was a major hindrance to the development of the Catholic Church as much as the insufficient number of “good” priests, in that their scandals reinforced its traditional, authoritarian pattern⁹. However, instances of priestly misbehavior do not occur in the American West only, but – in a very transnational fashion – they appear throughout the United States and British North America, even in the province of Québec (Lower Canada from 1791), considered by contemporary Catholics as North America’s most accomplished church.

Undoubtedly, accusations of misbehavior do not always reflect actual wrongdoings. Increasingly, Protestants waged them in order to show the moral debasement of their Catholic adversaries. The writings of the fictional Religious Hospitaller of St. Joseph of Montréal, Maria Monk, and of the Charlestown convent’s Ursuline postulant, Rebecca Theresa Reed (fl.1831-5), are good examples of such bogus accusations¹⁰. For their part, some Catholic priests made use of simi-

8 CODIGNOLA, Luca. Roman catholic conservatism in a new North Atlantic world, 1760-1829. *The William and Mary Quarterly*, Williamsburg, v. 64, n. 4, p. 717-756, 2007, also in RAGNOW, Marguerite; PHILLIPS, William D.. Jr. (ed.). *Religious conflict and accommodation in the early modern world*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 2011. p. 153-206.

9 DICHTL, John R. *Frontiers of faith: bringing Catholicism to the west in the early republic*. Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2008. p. 86.

10 FARRELLY, Maura J. *Anti-Catholicism in America, 1620-1860*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018. p. 153-156; FRENCH, Kara M. Prejudice for profit: escaped nun stories and American Catholic print culture. *Journal of the Early Republic*, Philadelphia, v. 39 n. 3, p. 503-535, 2019; YACOVAZZI, Cassandra L. *Escaped nuns: true womanhood and the campaign against convents in Antebellum America*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2018.

lar slurs in order to show or suggest the unworthiness of rival fellow priests. As shown by Canadian historian Terrence Murphy's in-depth analysis of the ecclesiastical conflict in the Atlantic provinces of British North America, examples of such accusations, are too numerous to be simply described as exceptional or calumnious¹¹.

One then wonders, first, whether investigations of priestly misbehavior should be placed in a larger geographical framework encompassing the whole of French- and English-speaking North America; secondly, whether definitions of such misbehavior should be made to account for more than just the usual triad, i.e., illicit sex, immoderate drinking, and excessive avariciousness, so as to include deviancy from the norms in a more general sense. These norms are those originally set by the Council of Trent (1545-63) as they were interpreted and disseminated from the local bishops downwards towards their flock through the intermediary of the clergy. In the next few pages, rather than a list of individual instances of alleged misbehavior as they surface from the primary sources, a blueprint for further research is proposed, in which these instances can be interpreted as part of a general grid. Before we get to this, however, let us briefly review instances of priestly misbehavior relating to sex, drinking, and avariciousness¹².

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Illicit sex, normally referred to as libertinism, is by far the least explicit element in the triad. Whatever was uttered in a confessional remained there. Priests never mentioned their own problems in

11 MURPHY, Terrence. The emergence of maritime Catholicism, 1781-1830. *Acadiensis*, Fredericton, v. 13, n. 2, p. 29-49, 1984; also in BUCKNER, Phillip A.; FRANK, David (ed.). *The Acadiensis reader*. Fredericton: Acadiensis Press, 1985. v. 1, p. 68-88.

12 Terrence Murphy lists "the abuse of alcohol, [...] sexual impropriety, and [...] financial chicanery" as the most prominent examples of misbehavior (MURPHY, Terrence. Op. cit., p. 36). He adds "insubordination" to his list, a category that we will discuss below under the rubric of "conflicting political choices."

their written correspondence, nor did their superiors openly reprimanded them on that count. Yet accusations of sexual misbehavior waged against other priests are not uncommon. Among them, here is a hint that in Newfoundland a fellow priest engaged in illicit practices with boys, who were his nephews – or so he justified himself. Other priests were accused of spending too much time late at night with women in public houses. Pierre Gibault (1737-1802), a priest originally from Québec, was severely scolded by his bishop for having sneakily brought with him his mother and sister to his distant mission in the American west¹³. He had thus contravened to the general rule that house servants must be over a certain age; in any case he had not asked for permission to do so. A number of priests were accused of being “married,” or at least to live with a woman as man and wife. Aside from the assessment of individual cases, which is beyond the scope of this article, what comes out from the missionaries’ correspondence is an obsession with sexual mores as the fundamental parameter on which to judge a fellow priest, a lay faithful, or an entire community. Dancing and night frolicking were, of course, either strictly forbidden or strongly discouraged, although not all priests were as severe as Étienne-Théodore Badin (1768-1853) and Charles Nerinckx (1761-1824) in Kentucky, Friedrich Johann Konrad Rese (1797-1871) in Ohio, or the Franciscan Observant Michael Anthony Fleming (c.1792-1850) in Newfoundland. Musicians who accompanied such events and houses that hosted them were barred from the sacraments, including confession and communion, and even threatened with excommunication. The northern forts and trading places, Michilimackinac in particular, were described as virtual brothels on account of the presence of loose women coming from Montréal. Marriage, the only Christian sacrament that allowed and – up to a certain point – encouraged sexual intercourse between man and woman, was the occasion of innumerable exchanges on whether and how to apply individual solutions to the many variables of illicit sex – unmarried

13 AAQ, 7 CM, VI, n. 17, [Jean-Olivier Briand] to Pierre Gibault, Québec, 26 Apr. 1769.

couples, couples consisting of relatives, Catholics who lived with Protestants, Catholic men sharing their roof with native concubines, etc.

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Immoderate drinking is a much more regular occurrence than illicit sex in the missionaries' correspondence with regard to their fellow priests and their flock. A jeremiad compiled by Bishop Rese in 1825 for the sake of the Holy See listed the "many public scandals" offered by the clergy of the diocese of Cincinnati, who are described as "married priests, brazen drunkards, greedy mercenaries, incendiary agitators, schismatic and excommunicated Hoganites, lecherous men, etc."¹⁴ (We will return to the avaricious priests, as well as to the agitator and Hoganite categories, below.) With regard to alcohol consumption, this was considered a vice common to many priests and a general instrument of evil which encouraged social gatherings outside of the church's control, stimulated promiscuity, loosened moral restraint in social behavior, promoted violence and made any attempt at the conversion of the native people a futile effort. Michael Francis Xavier Carroll (d.1824), a New Brunswick priest, was suspended for his propensity for staggering almost daily along the main streets of Saint John, only to be replaced by the notorious Dominican Charles Ffrench (1753-1850), "whose ordinary life was to go from house to house, where he returned every day, at ten, eleven o'clock, midnight, to drink everywhere he went, red wine, white wine, brandy, Holland gin, all that was offered to him"¹⁵. Indeed, clerical drunkenness was not a peculiarly North American problem. It was, for example, the "most prominent problem" in Ireland, the country of origin

14 APF, SOCG, v. 938, ff. 309rv-310rv, Friedrich Johann Konrad Rese to the Sacred Congregation "de Propaganda Fide", Cincinnati, 5 May 1825.

15 AAQ, 7 CM, IV, n. 18, Pierre-Antoine Malou, SJ, to [Joseph-Octave Plessis], New York City, 9 Dec. 1818 ("passoit son tems a faire des visites de maison en maison, revenoit tous les jours a dix onze heures et minuit, buvant dans toutes les maisons ou il alloit tantot du vin rouge, blanc, caudevie, genièvre, enfin tout ce qu'on lui presentoit").

of many North American priests¹⁶. In some cases, however, different standards seemed to apply to the New World, where open competition between Catholic clergy and Protestant ministers induced both parties to exploit any scandalous occurrence on the other side. In 1788, John Carroll (1735-1815), later to be appointed Archbishop of Baltimore, confirmed his interest in Irish priests willing to serve in United States, but felt it necessary to add that in the United States “[s]obriety in drink is expected from clergymen to a great degree” and that “which in many parts of Europe would be esteemed no more than a cheerful and allowable enjoyment” would be regarded there “as an unbecoming excess”¹⁷.

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Excessive avariciousness is, in a way, a more elusive and less straightforward element. For one french, who fled with the money entrusted to him for the building of a new chapel; or one William Phelan (c.1740-95), who had a ready list of fees for any sacramental service he provided; or one Angelo Inglesi (c.1795-1825), the *protégé* of the Sulpician Bishop Louis-Guillaume-Valentin Dubourg (1766-1833), who personally squandered or pocketed all the proceeds collected on an allegedly fundraising European tour, most priests encountered real problems in that they were not guaranteed any fixed income whatsoever¹⁸. Lower Canada was exceptional in this regard because French canon law and French customs had been exported to the colo-

16 CONNOLLY, Sean. J. *Priests and people in pre-famine Ireland 1780-1845*. 2. ed. Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1985. p. 66.

17 John Carroll to John Thomas Troy, Baltimore, 11 Aug. 1788. In: HANLEY, Thomas O. (ed.). *The John Carroll papers*. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1976. v. 1, p. 328.

18 CODIGNOLA, Luca. Charles Dominic Ffrench, OP: a scoundrel priest in need of a defence lawyer? In: CODIGNOLA, Luca. *Little do we know: history and historians of the North Atlantic, 1492-2010*. Editado por Matteo Binasco. Cagliari: CNR-ISEM, 2011a. p. 279-283 (Charles Ffrench); Idem. *Blurred nationalities across the North Atlantic: traders, priests, and their kin travelling between North America and the Italian peninsula, 1763-1846*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2019. p. 191-215 (Angelo Inglesi); MURPHY, Terrence. James Jones and the establishment of Roman Catholic

nies and kept even after the Treaty of Paris (1763). There priests were entitled to their tithes and to a supplementary income linked to certain functions such as marriages, funerals, and special masses. No matter how modest they were, the clergy's revenues were certain and, by and large, were there for life.

This system did not apply to the rest of British North America or to the United States. There, confusion reigned, as Old-World customs were employed side by side with New World solutions and distances further complicated episcopal oversight and control. These solutions were often devised along the way and opened the door for any sort of abuse on the part of the less principled missionaries. In British North America, the displaced Acadians continued to use the tithe system. The Irish communities, which comprised most of the new Catholic immigrants to North America even before the Great Famine of the late 1840s, tried to export the system of "ecclesiastical beggary" they had left at home – a mixture of voluntary contributions on the part of the faithful supplemented by fees for marriages, funerals, and special masses¹⁹. For their part, several bishops – French, English, and Gaelic-speaking – received gifts and regular emoluments from the British Crown, that recognized their role as keepers of the ethnic and social peace with regard to the native peoples, the Acadians, the *Canadiens*, the Irish, and the Scots – although in principle the Crown only supported the Church of England. (The Crown applied the same system closer to home, in Ireland and Scotland.)

In the United States, the federal government did not acknowledge the existence of any church, including the Catholic Church, except in their form as legally incorporated free associations²⁰. Furthermore, it did not intervene financially except in some cases where the native

church government in the Maritime Provinces. The Canadian Catholic Historical Association, *Study Sessions*, Toronto, v. 48, p. 26-42, 1981.

19 CONNOLLY, Sean. J. *Priests and people in pre-famine Ireland 1780-1845*. 2. ed. Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1985. p. 37.

20 KAUPER, Paul G.; ELLIS, Stephen C. Religious corporations and the law. *Michigan Law Review*, Ann Arbor, v. 71, n. 8, p. 1499-1574, 1973.

peoples were involved. Distant missionaries were then obliged to rely on the charity of their parishioners for their daily subsistence. This included the initial building of a church, its maintenance over time, and the addition of a school, besides the daily expenditures related to their board and lodging. The legal management of the church corporation (*fabrique* in French) was entrusted to a board of duly elected trustees (*marguilliers*) whose independence and power grew in accordance with the physical distance from the episcopal see. In the United States, as well as in the Atlantic provinces of British North America, the trustees increasingly avoked to themselves the right to hire and dismiss parish priests, as well as to allocate funds for new buildings or the maintenance of the existing ones. Conversely, bishops claimed their primacy in the selection of the ordained priests. The trustee controversy, as this conflict came to be known, reached its peak in the 1820s and 1830s and in the end was won by the episcopal side in conjunction with the triumph of Ultramontaniam.

As far as the missionaries were concerned, this confusion produced financial uncertainty and psychological strain. First, unemployed priests with no fixed income had to compete with their colleagues in order to obtain a position as parish priest. In order to win their case, they had to woo the board of trustees. Bishops themselves advised prospective candidates to secure their financial status before accepting any new responsibility. Secondly, although in theory they could retort by denying the sacraments to their unruly parishioners, financial uncertainty induced many to take advantage of their flock's ignorance of canon law by introducing irregular or potentially disreputable practices. For example, priests who had received their tithes in the form of agricultural products sometimes sold them back to their needy parishioners for a profit. Most of these peripheral communities, one should add, were extremely poor. Catholic faithful ranged from the fishermen of Newfoundland to the lumberjacks of the Miramichi valley, from the buffalo hunters of Saint-Boniface and Pembina to the voyageurs of the Great Lakes and the Missouri River region, down to the small farmers of Michigan, Illinois, Missouri, and Kentucky. Missionaries writing to their bishops complained about their

difficulties in raising money from their parishioners, but they also illustrated all too graphically their constant struggle for mere survival – against rains, floods, freezes, hot spells, bad harvests, locusts, even native violence, together with prohibitive transportation and commodity costs. All in all, these priests clung to all the moneys they could put their hands on. In doing so, however, they provided their opponents with ample ground on which to found their accusations of avariciousness.

Whether or not they reflected actual wrongdoings, these accusations of misbehavior were constantly floating around. One wonders whether they should not be inscribed in a larger grid where behavioral norms, originally spelled out by the Council of Trent, were interpreted differently whenever they were challenged by local conditions. Ethnic rivalries, different institutional traditions, conflicting political choices, and Protestant competition are the most likely candidates to populate such a larger framework.

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In the western world, the period from the American War of Independence through the Napoleonic Wars (1776-1815), and even more so the one that immediately followed the Congress of Vienna (1814-5), witnessed movements of peoples that were unprecedented in terms of number of migrants and rapidity of displacements. The population of the United States grew from 1,206,000 inhabitants in 1750 to 17,100,000 in 1840; British North America, from 55,000 in 1754 to 1,694,000 in 1841. Political refugees such as the American Loyalists and the French *émigrés* overlapped with economic migrants such as the Germans, the Scots, and the Irish.

The development of ethnic differentiations within the Catholic Church took unexpected directions for which its unilingual leaderships were ill-prepared. In the United States, the urban centers of the eastern seaboard increasingly became multiethnic poles of attraction. From there migrants belonging to different ethnic communities overflowed westward towards the Mississippi-Missouri River

system. (Immigration increased Catholics from 50,000 members and one diocese in 1800 to over 2,000,000 and 44 dioceses in 1860)²¹. In 1785 the Capuchin Charles Maurice Whelan (1741-1806) warned that any missionary sent to the United States needed to speak Irish, English, French, and Dutch because one's flock was likely to consist of those nationalities, as well as of Portuguese and Spanish²². As early as 1788 Carroll was embroiled in a major controversy with a community of German origin in Philadelphia. Two years later he echoed Saint Paul when he besought the Corinthians to "all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you"²³. In fact, Carroll begged the minuscule Catholic community of Boston to "lay aside national distinctions & attachments, & strive to form not Irish, or English, or French Congregations & Churches, but Catholic-American Congregations & Churches"²⁴. The disproportionate number of bishops, parish priests, and missionaries of French origin further exacerbated ethnic tensions. These French-speaking ecclesiastics often despised their Irish faithful, who comprised most of their community. The Sulpician Ambroise Maréchal (1764-1828), Carroll's successor, was very explicit in that regard: "There was a time," he wrote, "when we entertained a hope of seeing our holy Religion spread over the immense territory of the United States ... No obstacle seemed likely to oppose its Rapid propagation, when God in his inscrutable Justice permitted that Irish adventurers Came over to this Country"²⁵.

In British North America, ethnic communities tended to stick with their own kind and rarely did they intermingle. This arm-len-

21 HANDY, Robert T. *A history of the churches in the United States and Canada*. Oxford: At the Clarendon Press, 1976. p. 214.

22 APF, Congressi, America Centrale [hereafter C, AC], v. 2, ff. 442rv-443rv, Charles Maurice Whelan to [Giuseppe Maria Doria Pamphili], [New York City], 28 Jan. 1785.

23 THE HOLY BIBLE (King James version). 1 Corinthians I: 10.

24 Carroll to Boston Congregation, Baltimore, 10 Apr. 1790, *In*: HANLEY, Thomas O. (ed.). *The John Carroll papers*. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1976. v. 1, p. 441.

25 WDA, A, vol. 65, folder VI B 5, [n. 3], Ambroise Maréchal to [William Poynter], Baltimore, 30 March 1821.

gth distance avoided the slanderous and violent confrontations that characterized the American church. Yet there too the all-too-powerful presence of the Québec church made it necessary for the Irish and Scottish communities, in the Maritimes as well as in the West, to push for and in the end obtain the appointment of bishops of their own kind, such as Edmund Burke (1753-1820) in Nova Scotia, Angus Bernard MacEachern (1759-1835) in Prince Edward Island, and Alexander McDonell (1762-1840) in Upper Canada. Language, of course, was a major issue for missionaries who ventured outside of their own ethnic community. But whereas special expertise had always been an expected requirement for missionaries with the natives, some priests found themselves immersed in ethnic communities whose language they did not understand. In 1817 Rémi Gaulin (1787-1857), a young Lower Canadian priest who ended his career as bishop of Kingston, desperately tried to come to terms with the Scottish communities of Nova Scotia. Aside from the customary tirade against their frolicking, dancing, and drinking at christenings, weddings, and funerals, Gaulin confessed his inability to preach in Gaelic, the only language his flock understood. He also admitted that in the confessional he needed to consult a handy precis of sins that he had had translated into Gaelic in order to discern who he could or could not absolve and admit to the sacraments²⁶. Awkward situations such as Gaulin's, who was far from being an exception, all too easily provided fuel for utter ridicule of the ministering priest or for accusations of any sort of misdeeds.

This ethnic rivalry mainly pitted the French against the Irish. The French clerical emigration had its origin in the years of the French Revolution and immediately thereafter. As we know, many priests and nuns fled France; a few among them chose British North America or the United States. In Lower Canada, as confirmed by a recent history of the Sulpician Seminary of Montréal, these *émigré* priests amalgamated themselves with the pre-Conquest *Canadien* church,

26 AAQ, 301 CN, I, n. 41, Rémi Gaulin to Joseph-Octave Plessis, Margaree, 13 Oct. 1817.

whose moral standards had always been remarkably high²⁷. In the United States, as historian Michael T. Pasquier has shown, a good number of the French *émigré* priests had been trained in high-quality Sulpician institutions, either in France or at the St. Mary's Seminary of Baltimore²⁸. In both instances, the problems that surfaced were seldom linked to individual misbehavior. In fact, accusations waged against French-speaking priests almost invariably originated from within the Irish community with which they collided.

Indeed, it was the Irish clergy that were blamed by most of the other ethnic groups for continuous and scandalous misbehavior. Pre-Famine Irish emigrants were not as impoverished and destitute as they have often been depicted, yet wherever they went they were despised and treated as “the scum” of society by all other ethnic groups²⁹. Although a “devotional revolution” was beginning to take place, the standards of the practicing Catholics and of their clergy was very low in Ireland, reflecting a general laxity of discipline caused by the lack of control from the hierarchy and the customs of a popular folk religion³⁰. Penal laws against Catholics, although less and less enforced by the authorities, still made it necessary for the prospective clergy to provide for their own education and eventual ordination in the Irish colleges abroad.

27 DESLANDRES, Dominique; DICKINSON, John A.; HUBERT, Ollivier (ed.). *Les sulpiciens de Montréal: une histoire de pouvoir et de discrétion 1657-2007*. Montréal: Fides, 2007; LEMIEUX, Lucien. *Survivance française et seigneuriale 1760-1835*. In: AUMONT, Gérard (ed.). *Les prêtres de Saint-Sulpice au Canada: grandes figures de leur histoire*. Sainte-Foy: Les Presses de l'Université Laval, 1992. p. 99-123.

28 PASQUIER, Michael. *Fathers on the frontier: French missionaries and the Roman Catholic priesthood in the United States, 1789-1870*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010. See also his latest article, Idem. *Missionaries, martyrdom, and warfare in French colonial Louisiana, 1699-1764*. *The Catholic Historical Review*, Washington, DC, v. 105, n. 2, p. 304-326, 2019.

29 BOSSY, John. *The English Catholic community 1570-1850*. London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1975. p. 313 (“scum”); MANNION, John J. (ed.). *The peopling of Newfoundland: essays in historical geography*. St. John's: Memorial University of Newfoundland, 1977. p. 10.

30 CORISH, Patrick. J. *The Catholic community in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries*. Dublin: Helicon Limited, 1981. p. 82-115; LARKIN, Emmet J. *The Devotional Revolution in Ireland, 1850-1875*. *The American Historical Review*, Oxford, v. 77, n. 3, p. 625-652, 1972.

When they emigrated, the Irish (as most ethnic groups) brought with them their own priests, or easily accepted those who joined them in the New World. Local superiors in North America were so desperate for priests that rarely did they assess the quality of those who offered their services. Most of them arrived without any paper trail or *exceats* from their Irish superiors or claimed to have lost their documentation during their traveling vicissitudes. Furthermore, given the scarcity of priests in Ireland, even these candidates were in short supply. Hence the many poorly educated and low standard missionaries, often in conflict with their European superiors or held in low esteem by their community, who left Ireland in the hope to start anew and found a new employment in the New World, or were fleeing scandals and debts at home – “roaming priests,” as they were described, who attempted to be faster than their North Atlantic notoriety. Here is, for example, the Dominican Patrick Lonergan (1752-1804), who arrived in Newfoundland and Fogo Island from France in 1785, disappeared in the early days of the prefecture apostolic of the Franciscan Observant James Louis O’Donel (1737-1811), and reappeared in Spanish Upper Louisiana as a Capuchin in the late 1780s³¹.

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Instances of misbehavior on the part of fellow priests were also reported where, in fact, only the adherence to different institutional traditions was the issue at stake. When the Treaty of Paris (1763) ceded New Orleans and the territory west of the Mississippi River to the Spanish Crown, difficulties produced by political issues (see also below) coupled with ethnic biases overlapped with institutional je-

³¹ AAD, AB2, 116, n. 33, James Louis O’Donel to John Thomas Troy, St. John’s, 10 Nov. 1787 (Lonergan allegedly died in Fogo Island in a state of drunkenness); APF, Congressi, America Antille [hereafter C, AA], v. 2, ff. 562rv-563rv, James Louis O’Donel to [Leonardo Antonelli], St. John’s [Sept. 1785?]; BAUDIER, Roger. *The Catholic Church in Louisiana*. New Orleans: Hyatt Stationery, 1939. p. 207, 242; WDA, A, v. 42, [n. 44], James Keating, Patrick Gaul, and John Commins to [James Robert Talbot], Waterford, 14 Jan. 1784 (Patrick Lonergan’s name not explicit).

alousies. Gibault and former Jesuit Sébastien-Louis Meurin (1707-77), who at the time were active in the Illinois region, interpreted their spiritual role with regard to marriages in the extensive way suggested by Saint Roberto Bellarmino (1542-1621) for Protestant countries. However, the Capuchin Hilaire de Gênevaux (fl.1764-76), the rector of the St. Louis Church, then in Spanish territory, was adamant in refusing admission to sacraments to couples that had been married by the two Canadian missionaries and even refused to baptize their offspring³². The thirty-year saga of Antonio de Sedella (1748-1829) in New Orleans, yet another Capuchin who opposed the jurisdiction of his legitimate bishop by claiming adherence to a previous Spanish tradition, did not end until his own death as late as 1829. The purchase of Florida, through the Transcontinental or Adams-Onís Treaty between Spain and the United States (1819), involved similar difficulties and consequences³³.

In fact, local usages differed even within the same diocese of Québec, where episcopal regulations had been set and applied for over a century³⁴. In the Illinois region, for example, pews were put up for auction upon the holder's death, whereas in the Québec area proper pews automatically passed onto the widow of the deceased³⁵. Given the revenues provided by the renting or selling of pews, litigations were frequent. In 1787 Pierre Huet de La Valinière (1732-1806), a Sulpician who had been expelled from Québec for his pro-American leanings, publicly accused a Cahokia Carmelite, Paul de Saint-Pierre (1745/52-1826), of celebrating unlawful marriages between Catholi-

32 AAQ, 7 CM, VI, n. 42, Sébastien-Louis Meurin, SJ, to [Jean-Olivier Briand], Prairie-du-Rocher, 23 May 1776.

33 GANNON, Michael V. *The cross in the sand: the early Catholic church in Florida, 1513-1870*. Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1965. p. 117-136; PASQUIER, Michael.T. *Fathers on the frontier: French missionaries and the Roman Catholic priesthood in the United States, 1789-1870*. Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2010, p. 78-82.

34 The New France basic rules still applied, as detailed in SAINT-VALLIER, Jean-Baptiste de. *Rituel du Diocese de Quebec, publié par l'ordre de Monseigneur de Saint-Vallier, évêque de Quebec*. Paris: Simon Langlois, 1703.

35 AAQ, 7 CM, VI, n. 23, Pierre Gibault to [Jean-Olivier Briand], Vincennes, [Nov. 1770].

cs and Protestants – and on a forbidden date at that. The Carmelite, whose original family name was von Heiligenstein, retorted that in his native German-speaking country by virtue of the Pragmatic Sanction (1713), as well as in France, those unions were a common and accepted occurrence. Even Bishop Carroll, he added, had allowed such mixed marriage to take place in his own family; furthermore, in the United States there were no prohibited days for marriages and no dispensations were then required³⁶.

The transfer of a territory from one jurisdiction to another evidenced differences of the same sort. For example, after the 1794 Treaty of London (or Jay's Treaty) between Great Britain and the United States, two French-speaking Sulpicians, Michel Levadoux (1746-1815) and François-Xavier Dufaux (1752-96), respectively in charge of the parishes of Sainte-Anne-du-Détroit (Michigan), in the diocese of Baltimore, and L'Assomption (Upper Canada), in the diocese of Québec, were startled in noticing the several differences in their rituals and customs. Levadoux, an *émigré* priest, could not receive any tithe unless he signed an individual contract with each parishioner in exchange for his spiritual service; could not ask for any fee for marriage dispensations; was not assisted by the government in raising the moneys due to him; did not observe Holy Saturday and Lent; could perform weddings any day of the week; could confess at home; and did not dress in any ecclesiastical garb. The opposite, of course, was true of Montréal-born Dufaux, a priest of the old guard, who still intoned "God Save the King" when his American *confrère* sang "God Save the People"³⁷. Some particularly strict *émigré* priests who tried to replicate their ideal model of Christianity in the Early Republic found it difficult to accept local variations. In 1806 the Sulpician Pierre Babad (1763-1846) enquired with the Sacred Congregation "de Propaganda Fide" in Rome on how to deal with priests who disrupted any advi-

36 NARA, M 247, r 62, i 48, p. 53, Paul von Heiligenstein, OCarm, to Barthélemi Tardiveau, Cahokia, 17 Sept. 1787.

37 AAQ, 7 CM, V, n. 124, François-Xavier Dufaux to Jean-François Hubert, Detroit, 2 Sept. 1796.

sable uniformity in the United States because they had been raised in Europe in a variety of disciplinary and ritual backgrounds. Babad was particularly concerned with the reproachable use of English instead of Latin, a practice that had been imposed by the American Jesuits but had later been approved by Bishop Carroll. In his view, this slackness made priests dangerously similar to Protestant ministers³⁸. Undoubtedly, differing attitudes towards other institutional traditions provided yet another opportunity for ill-tempered ecclesiastics to accuse their fellow priests of any sort of alleged misbehavior.

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Conflicting political choices were another occasion for personal clashes and reciprocal accusations. In the United States, all seemed to agree with Bishop Carroll's 1783 invitation "to preserve, cultivate, and promote" co-operation by "always behaving as good subjects faithfully attached to [their] political Government"³⁹. However, the issue of African slavery was an unresolved issue through the American Civil War. The Jesuits employed dozens of slaves in their Maryland plantations, and so did the Ursulines in Louisiana. Missionaries in the western frontier did not think twice about availing themselves of African slaves as well as Panis as domestic servants⁴⁰. In 1804 an anonymous gentleman tried to entice Irish missionaries to join him

38 APF, Congregazioni Particolari, v. 145, ff. 101rv-102rv, Pierre Babad to [Antonio Dugnani], Baltimore, 16 Nov. 1805; *ibid.*, ff. 103rv-105rv, Pierre Babad to [Lorenzo Litta], Baltimore, 21 Nov. 1806. See also MURPHY, Thomas. *Jesuit Slaveholding in Maryland, 1717-1838*. New York: Routledge, 2001. p. 111.

39 APF, C, AC, v. 2, ff. 328rv-331rv, John Carroll to [the Sacred Congregation "de Propaganda Fide"], Maryland, 10 Nov. 1783 ("dobbiamo in ogni modo cercare di conservare, coltivare, e promuovere con ogni prudenza, comportandoci in tutte l'occorrenze come boni sudditi fedelmente attaccati al nostro Governo politico." A similar copy of this letter is in Carroll to [unknown cardinal], Maryland, 10 Nov. 1783, in HANLEY, Thomas O. (ed.). *The John Carroll papers*. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1976. v. 1, p. 81, but the addressee is unlikely to be Vitaliano Cardinal Borromeo (1720-93), as stated there.

40 Panis (Pawnee in English), was the common name used to designate all native slaves. See RUSHFORTH, Brett. *Bonds of alliance: indigenous and Atlantic slaveries in New France*. Chapel

in the wilds of Kentucky by offering them land, a house, money for initial expenses, and, of course, slaves⁴¹. Even enlightened church leaders, such as the former Jesuit Giovanni Antonio Grassi (1775-1849), who denounced slavery as a fundamental contravention of the American Constitution, could not agree with any abolitionist solutions⁴². Carroll was easily attacked by the likes of John Thayer (1755-1815) and the Dominican William Vincent Harold, Jr. (c.1785-1856) over the issue of slaveholding, which the bishop defended as a necessary evil under the circumstances⁴³. Thayer might have been motivated by the zeal and eagerness of a newly-convert, but Harold's attention was focused on the management of the Philadelphia troublesome diocese. (This was the object of Bishop Rese's 1825 tirade against "incendiary agitators, schismatic, and excommunicated Hoganites," mentioned above)⁴⁴. In the wake of the so-called Hogan Schism, Harold tellingly used slavery as a rhetorical weapon against Carroll, his major opponent, although he does not seem to be motivated by any abolitionist urge himself⁴⁵. Earlier on, the attitude towards the American War of Independence had caused a rift among French-speaking priests. Gibault combined a rebellious character with his support of the Americans. In 1777 the Bishop of Québec, Jean-Olivier Briand (1715-94), reproached him for being too familiar and outspoken with women,

Hill: The University of North Carolina Press for the Omohundro Institute of Early American History and Culture, 2012.

41 AAD, AB2, 29. 10, n. 33, [unknown Kentucky gentleman] to John Thomas Troy, Lexington, 27 Apr. 1804.

42 GRASSI, Giovanni A. *Notizie varie sullo stato presente della repubblica degli Stati Uniti dell'America Settentrionale, scritte al principio del 1818*. Rome: Luigi Perego Salvioni, 1818. p. 13-14.

43 Carroll to John Thayer, Baltimore, 13 Jan. 1794, in HANLEY, Thomas O. (ed.). *The John Carroll papers*. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1976. v. 2, p. 109; Carroll to Thayer, Baltimore, 15 July 1794, in *ibidem*. p. 122-123. See also MURPHY, Thomas. *Op. cit.*, p. 74-75.

44 William Hogan (1788-1848) had been excommunicated in 1821. See HESSINGER, Rodney. "A base and unmanly conspiracy": Catholicism and the Hogan Schism in the gendered marketplace of Philadelphia. *Journal of the Early Republic*, Philadelphia, v. 31, n. 3, p. 357-396, 2011.

45 For Rome's position on the issue, see KREBSBACH, Suzanne. Rome's response to slavery in the United States. *The Catholic Historical Review*, Washington, DC, v. 105, n. 2, p. 327-344, 2019.

for drinking too much, and for boasting about it – attitudes more appropriate for a *voyageur*, the bishop remarked, than for a priest. A hero in the eyes of the Americans, Gibault was shunned by the Québec church. In fact, Gibault did not even try to reestablish any contact with Briand, whom he still considered his spiritual guide, until the end of the war⁴⁶. Co-operation with the British, however, had its limits. In 1790 Bishop Jean-François Hubert (1739-97) rallied 150 of his 156 priests against his newly-appointed coadjutor and designated successor, Charles-François Bailly de Messein (1740-94), who was supportive of the Crown's project of a "tolerant" university in the province⁴⁷. Only a few years later the French-speaking priests of the Detroit region openly voiced their opposition to Burke's arrival in 1794, as he, an unflinching loyalist, had been personally selected by the Crown to counteract their presence⁴⁸. However, the same Burke, by then a missionary in Nova Scotia, was reprimanded by O'Donel, his Newfoundland colleague. O'Donel accused Burke of waging a David vs. Goliath challenge in his bellicose polemics against the local Protestant churches. He invited him to lower his tone, which annoyed the Catholic community and made them fear for their very survival⁴⁹. About one generation later, when Joseph-Octave Plessis (1763-1825) accepted the Crown's offer of a seat in Lower Canada's Legislative Council (1817), the Sulpician Seminary of Montréal took the opportunity to accuse the bishop of collusion with an institution which required an oath of allegiance to a Protestant king⁵⁰. In all these instances

46 AAQ, 7 CM, VI, n. 43, [Jean-Olivier Briand] to [Pierre Gibault], Québec, 26 Apr. 1777; *ibidem.*, n. 48, Pierre Gibault to [Jean-Olivier Briand], Ste. Genevieve, 1 Apr. 1783.

47 APF, SOCG, v. 888, ff. 82rv-85rv, Jean-François Hubert to Leonardo Antonelli, Québec, 8 Nov. 1790.

48 AAQ, 7 CM, V, n. 111, Pierre Fréchette to Jean-François Hubert, Detroit, 23 Oct. 1795 ("C'est une verité qui ne peut etre Caché que M.^r Burk à apporté le trouble dans nos paroisses"); *ibidem.*, n. 116, François-Xavier Dufaux to Jean-François Hubert, Detroit, 9 Nov. 1795 ("Il n'est pas possible de simaginer, jusqua quel point M.^r. Burke a troublé nos paroisses").

49 AAQ, 30 CN, I, n. 20, James Louis O'Donel to Edmund Burke, St. John's, 8 Apr. 1804.

50 APF, SOCG, v. 937, ff. 252rv-267rv, [Louis de Sambucy] to the Sacred Congregation "de Propaganda Fide", [Rome], [shortly before Aug. 1823], one of many similar memoranda.

political choices were at stake, not personal misbehavior. Yet in supporting their case both parties did not refrain from trying to exploit the opponent's personal shortcomings.

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Another issue that proved to be divisive within the Catholic clergy was the attitude to be kept vis-à-vis “heretic” Protestantism and the Protestant churches. Theoretically, no openings were permitted. Local conditions, however, made attitudes change over time. The unexpected toleration that the Catholic Church had enjoyed after the Conquest of Canada (1760) and American independence, as well as the open-door policy applied by the British Crown towards the five to eight thousands refugee priests that had managed to escape the carnage of the French Revolution, had convinced many that cohabitation, if not co-operation, was advisable. When William Poynter (1762-1827), later vicar apostolic in the London district, returned to England in 1795 after two difficult decades in France, he confided to his colleague in Québec how much he had come to appreciate “the great freedom in the practice of Religion” in England and the good disposition of Crown officials⁵¹. Even the reading and use of Protestant bibles had come to be accepted by Catholic leaders. O'Donel remarked that there was no difference in the text of a Protestant or a Catholic bible and that both could be legitimately used. At any rate, he remarked, both versions comprised such a variety of truths that any oath taken on either could be considered valid⁵². Even a much stricter missionary as the Piedmontese Vincentian Felice De Andreis (1778-1820) allowed that in Missouri a rigid interpretation of ecclesiastical laws had to be bent to allow for the use and reading of Protestant bibles⁵³.

51 AAQ, 90 CM, II, n. 34, William Poynter to Joseph-Octave Plessis, [London], 25 Feb. 1819.

52 AAQ, 30 CN, I, n. 13, James Louis O'Donel to [Joseph-Octave Plessis], St. John's, 24 Sept. 1800.

53 APF, C, AC, v. 3, ff. 572rv-573rv, Felice de Andreis to Simone Ugo, Bardstown, 20 May 1817.

In sum, for at least two generations around the turn of the eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries in the North Atlantic world an atmosphere of enlightened moderation positioned itself along stricter doctrinal interpretations. O'Donel in Newfoundland as well as Carroll in Baltimore shared with Poynter the notion of the social utility of the Christian religion regardless of individual denominations. Industry and thriftiness, poor relief through charity, encouragement to arts without extravagant expenses, and above all an orderly society ruled by a moderate and enlightened government were, in their view, Christianity's unifying features⁵⁴. Still, this open-minded attitude on the part of the clergy decreased with the passing of time, and in the course of the early nineteenth century a new militant Ultramontanism began to prevail in parallel with the rise of Protestant nativism and a new wave of anti-Catholicism⁵⁵.

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Whether accusations of priestly misbehavior reflected real or imagined deviancy from the norms, in assessing the all-too-plentiful evidence historians must not discard personal antipathies and

54 CODIGNOLA, Luca. Roman Catholic conservatism in a new North Atlantic world, 1760-1829. *The William and Mary Quarterly*, Williamsburg, v. 64, n. 4, p. 717-756, 2007. p. 721; MURPHY, Terrence. Religion, conflict and consensus in the English-speaking colonies of British North America. *US Catholic Historian*, Washington, DC, v. 14, n. 4, p. 25-38, 1996a; Idem. The English-speaking colonies to 1854. In: MURPHY, Terrence; PERIN Roberto (ed.). *A concise history of Christianity in Canada*. Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1996b. p. 108-189. p. 124-125.

55 FARRELLY, Maura J. *Anti-Catholicism in America, 1620-1860*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018; FENTON, Elizabeth. *Religious liberties: anti-Catholicism and liberal democracy in nineteenth-century US literature and culture*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011; FRANCHOT, Jenny. *Roads to Rome: the Antebellum Protestant encounter with Catholicism*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993; GJERDE, Jon. *Catholicism and the shaping of nineteenth-century America*. Editado por S. Deborah Kang. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012; MURPHY, Terrence. The English-speaking colonies to 1854. In: MURPHY, Terrence; PERIN Roberto (ed.). *A concise history of Christianity in Canada*. Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1996b. p. 108-189, p. 170-177; PERIN, Roberto. *Ignace de Montréal: artisan d'une identité nationale*. Montréal: Boréal, 2008.

generational gaps. For example, that Maréchal did not see eye to eye with the Bishop of Charleston, John England (1786-1842), twenty-two years his younger and an Irishman at that, is a known fact, but neither did Badin and the Sulpician Bishop of Bardstown, Benoît-Joseph Flaget (1763-1850), in spite of their sharing ethnic origins, language, age, and western surroundings. Individual frailty in the presence of particularly harsh local conditions, coupled with an imperfect education, must also be considered when trying to assess compliance with unattainable moral ideals on the part of the clergy. In this regard, although the human geography of the known instances cannot be used as a yardstick for statistical evidence, these do show, in North America, that frontier regions had a greater recurrence of such incidents and that communities of Irish origin seemed more inclined to produce them.

Frontier regions such as Newfoundland and New Brunswick in Atlantic British North America, and the Great Lakes, Kentucky, and Missouri in the American west were especially challenging. In 1770 the journey from Prairie-du-Rocher to Vincennes, a village that had not seen a priest for six years, was deemed too dangerous to be undertaken by any missionary⁵⁶. Gibault barely managed to slip through the lurking natives and save his scalp by taking all sorts of precautions⁵⁷, which included the carrying with him of his “gun and two pistols” as he did “whenever [he left] for any journey”⁵⁸. De Andreis’s depiction of his station in St. Louis, “at the extremity of the Earth, on the banks of the Mississippi, with nothing between us and the Pacific Ocean, which separates us from China,” in a land swept by the icy Canadian and Greenland winds, is nothing short of heroic⁵⁹. But so

56 AAQ, 7 CM, VI, n. 26, Sébastien-Louis Meurin to [Jean-Olivier Briand], Prairie-du-Rocher, 11 June 1770.

57 AAQ, 7 CM, VI, n. 22, Pierre Gibault to [Jean-Olivier Briand], Kaskaskia, 15 June 1770.

58 AAQ, 7 CM, VI, n. 23, Pierre Gibault to [Jean-Olivier Briand], Vincennes, [Nov. 1770].

59 APF, C, AC, v. 8, ff. 32rv-37rv, Felice de Andreis to Carlo Domenico Sicardi, St. Louis, [24 Feb. 1818?], printed in: RYBOLT, John E. (ed.). *Frontier missionary: Felix de Andreis, CM: 1778-1820: correspondence and historical writings*. Chicago: Vincentian Studies Institute, 2005. p. 186-187.

are MacEachern's descriptions of his wintertime pastoral visitations: he ministered all alone to Prince Edward Island and adjacent regions from 1790 to 1800 and again from 1804 to 1812. Newfoundland was not only home to many poorly educated and low standard Irish missionaries, but, for all its rugged beauty, really was a cold and inhospitable place. The letters of its superiors stand out for a pervasive sense of isolation, loneliness, and abandonment rarely to be found elsewhere. O'Donel and his successors, the Franciscans Observant Patrick Lambert (1754-1816) and Thomas Scallan (1765-1830), complained over and over of the tiny and dangerous open fishing boats needed to reach their flock, often consisting of an "unprincipled and ignorant set of lawless wretches." These little communities were scattered "in coastal regions, in the hollows of hills and forests" of the coastal regions and had such unlikely names for a bishop to visit as Rogue's Roost or Gallows Cove. The vicars apostolic also suffered from the isolation from their few fellow missionaries, "cut off ... by an interval of inaccessible mountains and forests," whom they rarely met and often at the risk of being drowned⁶⁰.

The complaint about the dearth of fellow priests is an all-time recurring *leitmotif* in ecclesiastical correspondence. Even in Rome, where the ratio was one priest for every fifteen residents or so, they were deemed to be insufficient⁶¹. Yet in frontier North America the real problem was not the overall lack of priests, but their personal isolation. Indeed, in Newfoundland the missionaries spent most of the year alone, but so did most priests posted in frontier missions throu-

60 AAD, AB2, 29, 11, n. 69, Patrick Lambert to John Thomas Troy, St. John's, 9 June 1807, printed in: BYRNE, Cyril J. (ed.). *Gentlemen-bishops and faction fighters: the letters of bishops O Donel, Lambert, Scallan and other Irish missionaries*. St. John's: Jesperson Press, 1984. p. 238; APF, C. AA, v. 2, ff. 562rv-563rv, James Louis O'Donel to [Leonardo Antonelli], St. John's, [Sept. 1785?]; *ibid.*, v. 3, ff. 58rv-59rv, James Louis O'Donel to [the Sacred Congregation "de Propaganda Fide"], St. John's, 14 Dec. 1790.

61 APF, Congregazioni Particolari, v. 143, ff. 43rv-46rv, Propaganda's internal memorandum, [1805] (on a new college for foreign missions); GROSS, Hanns. *Rome in the Age of Enlightenment: the post-Tridentine syndrome and the Ancien Regime*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990. p. 68 (data for 1740 and earlier).

ghout North America. Communal institutions – such as colleges, convents, community houses, schools, and the like – were set up as soon as possible, but in the early days of any mission no such communal facilities were available. Priests were left alone among lay communities that were often hostile, whose members they could not meet socially except in the taverns, where their presence was often described as scandalous. They spent months, sometime years, without meeting a fellow priest, which also meant they could not relieve themselves of the burden of their sins through confession. They took advantage of the occasional traveler to send letters to their superiors in Baltimore, Québec, Dublin, and even Rome, asking for opinions, sanctions, and permissions. Answers, however, did not arrive until months, years later – if they ever did. In the meantime, doubts and a sense of guilt crept in. If even ecclesiastical leaders experienced such psychological difficulties, it is no wonder that so many of their missionaries, especially the poorly educated ones, often collapsed under the stress caused by the isolation, the sparse population, the uprooting, the lack of cultural cohesiveness in the new communities, the distance from episcopal authority, and the difficulty in receiving or administering the sacraments. The results were all too obvious: illicit sex, excessive drinking, and an obsession with money, which caused an impending sense of guilt and often mental imbalance. These were often the toll these men had to pay for their isolation.

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When examined in its larger, transnational context, the overall picture of the North American misbehaving priests appears to be more complicated than that of several – indeed, many – individuals who allegedly “reneged” their spiritual call and ecclesiastical duty by succumbing to the devilish temptations offered by sex, alcohol, and money. Now that all too often church history is interpreted through the redeeming but biased lens of grievance history, past accusations of misbehavior are taken at face value and any critical evaluation is not deemed worth the effort. Admittedly, in the past ecclesiastical historians had used the same uncritical approach when they treated

instances of misbehavior as exceptions to be hidden or divulged as little as possible.

In conclusion, we believe, first of all, historians must sift through their sources in the same way as they would do with regard to any historical question, in order to assess and verify whether the accusations that emerge reflected real wrongdoings. A more careful attention to primary evidence and a grasp of nuance are indeed in order. Secondly, historians must acknowledge that incidents were more likely to occur in certain areas and in certain communities. They must also ask why that happened. We have argued that frontier conditions were a major factor in shaping the missionaries' sense of despairing loneliness and in intensifying their emotional frailty. We have also suggested, in the period we have examined, that the clergy of Irish origin were more prone to misbehavior on account of lower educational standards at home and of their belonging to a migrant community that, all in all, was especially disadvantaged when compared to other ethnic communities in British North America as well as in the United States.

Thirdly, and perhaps more significantly, historians must be aware that, far from being a monolithic body, the Catholic Church allowed for a variety of solutions to local contingencies that more often than not engendered conflicts within its clerical ranks. We have shown ethnic rivalries, differing institutional traditions, diverging political choices, and the response to Protestant competition might have been, for the period considered in this article, the major issues at stake. Priests finding themselves on opposite sides, we have also argued, would quite simply try to discredit and undermine each other through accusations of personal misbehavior, which were not necessarily based on actual wrongdoings.

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APF, Congressi, America Centrale, v. 2, ff. 328rv-331rv, John Carroll to [Propaganda], Maryland, 10 Nov. 1783.

APF, Congressi, America Centrale, v. 2, ff. 442rv-443rv, Charles Maurice Whelan to [Giuseppe Maria Doria Pamphili], [New York City], 28 Jan. 1785.

APF, Congressi, America Antille, v. 2, ff. 562rv-563rv, James Louis O'Donel to [Leonardo Antonelli], St. John's, [Sept. 1785?].

APF, SOCG, v. 888, ff. 82rv-85rv, Jean-François Hubert to Leonardo Antonelli, Québec, 8 Nov. 1790.

APF, Congressi, America Antille, v. 3, ff. 58rv-59rv, James Louis O'Donel to [Propaganda], St. John's, 14 Dec. 1790.

APF, Congregazioni Particolari, v. 143, ff. 43rv-46rv, Propaganda's internal memorandum, [1805].

APF, Congregazioni Particolari, v. 145, ff. 101rv-102rv, Pierre Babad to [Antonio Dugnani], Baltimore, 16 Nov. 1805.

APF, Congregazioni Particolari, v. 145, ff. 103rv-105rv, Pierre Babad to [Lorenzo Litta], Baltimore, 21 Nov. 1806.

APF, Congressi, America Centrale, v. 3, ff. 572rv-573rv, Felice de Andreis to Simone Ugo, Bardstown, 20 May 1817.

APF, Congressi, America Centrale, v. 8, ff. 32rv-37rv, Felice de Andreis to Carlo Domenico Sicardi, St. Louis, 24 Feb. [1818?].

APF, SOCG, v. 937, ff. 252rv-267rv, [Louis de Sambucy] to Propaganda, [Rome], [shortly before Aug. 1823].

APF, SOCG, v. 938, ff. 309rv-310rv, Friedrich Johann Konrad Rese to Propaganda, Cincinnati, 5 May 1825.

Westminster Diocesan Archives [WDA]

WDA, A, v. 42, [n. 44], James Keating, Patrick Gaul, and John Commins to [James Robert Talbot], Waterford, 14 Jan. 1784.

WDA, A, v. 65, folder VI B 5, [n. 3], Ambroise Maréchal to [William Poynter], Baltimore, 30 March 1821.

The National Archives and Records Administration [NARA]

NARA, M 247, r 62, i 48, p. 53, Paul von Heiligenstein, OCarm, to Barthélemi Tardiveau, Cahokia, 17 Sept. 1787.

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