

The Emergence of Maritime Catholicism, 1781-1830

Terrence Murphy

Volume 13, numéro 2, spring 1984

URI : https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/acad13_2art02

[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

Éditeur(s)

The Department of History of the University of New Brunswick

ISSN

0044-5851 (imprimé)

1712-7432 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

Citer cet article

Murphy, T. (1984). The Emergence of Maritime Catholicism, 1781-1830. *Acadiensis*, 13(2), 29-49.

TERRENCE MURPHY

The Emergence of Maritime Catholicism, 1781-1830

THE YEARS BETWEEN 1781 AND 1830 were a time of fundamental change for the Catholics of the Maritimes. At the beginning of the period, the Catholic body was a small, almost homogeneous community, proscribed by law and dependent on the diocese of Quebec; at the end, it was much larger and more diverse in membership, fully emancipated, and governed by its own bishops. Demographic, constitutional, and ecclesiastical developments had combined in different degrees to transform the very character of the Maritime Catholic community. The change was achieved, however, against a background of confusion and conflict, uncertainty and unrest. Leaders of the Catholic community struggled to find an adequate supply of priests, to regulate the relationship between clergy and laity, to establish discipline among an unruly population, and to maintain a *modus vivendi* with non-Catholics and the civil authorities. Amid faltering attempts to deal with a rapidly changing situation, Maritime Catholics achieved greater autonomy in the administration of their religious affairs and the church emerged as one of the region's major social institutions.

The developments which occurred among Catholics at this time were part of a broader pattern of religious change. The late 18th and early 19th centuries were the formative period for all the principal denominations in the region. The Church of England, for example, had been established in law since 1758, but it was only in the wake of the American Revolution that serious consideration was given to its influence in colonial society. Imperial officials sought to bolster the connection between church and state as a means of enhancing the loyalty of the remaining British colonies. In many respects, their attempt to strengthen the Church of England failed. The appointment of Charles Inglis as the first Bishop of Nova Scotia in 1787 did not win for the Established Church the wide popular support that the promoters of the scheme had predicted. Nevertheless, an important change had occurred in the constitution of colonial Anglicanism. Meanwhile, immigration from Scotland established Presbyterianism as a major denomination which by 1817 claimed the allegiance of approximately one-quarter of the population of the Maritimes. Secessionist Presbyterians, who predominated at first, had achieved sufficient maturity by that time to form the independent Synod of Nova Scotia, the importance of which was only partly mitigated by subsequent conflicts with the rival Church of Scotland. For the Newlights and Methodists, the period was one of transformation from evangelical sects into stable denominations. The formation of the Baptist Association in 1800 was a milestone in this respect, as was the decision by Maritime Methodists to transfer their affiliation from the American Methodist Episcopal

Church to the more conservative British Conference.¹

By the same token, Anglicans and Protestant dissenters experienced problems which were similar in many ways to those encountered by Catholics. To one degree or another, each of the denominations felt the difficulty of finding sufficient clergy to meet the needs of a rapidly expanding population. The problem was exacerbated by the failure of congregations to provide adequate financial support, which in turn gave rise to conflict between clergy and laity. Relations between the various churches were generally harmonious, partly because the Anglican establishment, which was more nominal than real, excited little jealousy or resentment. Controversy arose, however, when dissenters tried to overcome the few disabilities from which they suffered. The most serious dispute centred around the Anglican monopoly of higher education.² The situation of Protestant dissenters differed fundamentally from that of Catholics, since they had been guaranteed religious freedom from the outset. Still, their attempts to destroy the last vestiges of Anglican exclusiveness ran parallel to the campaign for Catholic emancipation.

The transformation of Maritime Catholicism began in the 1780s. At the beginning of the decade, the Catholic body in most of the region still consisted mainly of Acadians and Indians. A number of Irish Catholics had been concentrated in Halifax since the founding of the city in 1749, however, and from this quarter a small circle of merchants and entrepreneurs gradually emerged as Catholic spokesmen. Their appearance on the scene was decisive, for they comprised one of the most dynamic (and at times one of the most controversial) elements in Maritime Catholicism. Their activities resembled the efforts of lay committees in Ireland and England who had successfully campaigned for relief from the penal code.³ Members of the group were set apart from the bulk of Irish immigrants by the early date of their arrival and also by their relative prosperity.⁴ They constituted a small but rising Irish Catholic middle class and

1 On the development of the Church of England during this period, see Judith Fingard, "Charles Inglis and His 'Primitive Bishoprick' in Nova Scotia", *Canadian Historical Review*, XLIX (1968), pp. 247-66, and *The Anglican Design in Loyalist Nova Scotia: 1783-1816* (London, 1972). On Presbyterianism, see John S. Moir, *Enduring Witness: A History of the Presbyterian Church in Canada* (Toronto, 1974). On Baptists, see G.E. Levy, *The Baptists of the Maritime Provinces: 1753-1946* (Saint John, 1946) and Barry M. Moody, ed., *Repent and Believe: The Baptist Experience in Maritime Canada* (Wolfville, 1980). On Methodists, see E.A. Betts, *Bishop Black and His Preachers: The Story of Maritime Methodism to 1825* (Halifax, 1974) and Goldwin French, *Parsons and Politics: The Rôle of the Wesleyan Methodists in Upper Canada and the Maritimes from 1780 to 1855* (Toronto, 1962).

2 See Susan Bugey, "Churchmen and Dissenters: Religious Toleration in Nova Scotia, 1758-1835", M.A. thesis, Dalhousie University, 1981.

3 On the English Catholic committee, see Bernard Ward, *The Dawn of the Catholic Revival* (2 vols., London, 1909), vol. 1, pp. 88 ff. On the Irish Catholic committee, see Philip Hughes, *The Catholic Question: 1688-1829* (London, 1929), pp. 179-80, and R.B. McDowell, *Ireland in the Age of Imperialism and Revolution: 1760-1801* (Oxford University Press, 1979), pp. 186-7.

4 An indenture of 16 October 1782 conveying land for a chapel names William Meany, John

were exactly the kind of men who possessed the incentive and ability to work for an improvement in the overall situation of Catholics. In 1781 they began to petition the lieutenant-governor for repeal of the anti-Catholic laws of 1758.⁵ Their petitions did not meet with immediate success, but in two years the obstacles had been overcome and the Nova Scotia legislature passed the first Catholic relief act, lifting the prohibition against Catholic priests and allowing Catholics to acquire land by deed or inheritance as well as by grant of the crown.⁶

The success of these efforts occurred just as the Catholic population began to rise sharply. The arrival of Catholic Loyalists and disbanded servicemen in 1783 and 1784 was followed by waves of immigration from Britain. Accurate statistics concerning the increase in the Catholic population during this period are impossible to obtain, but we know enough to see the overall pattern of growth. In the 1780s each of the centres of Catholic settlement, such as Halifax, Isle Madame, Prince Edward Island and southwestern Nova Scotia, contained between 100 and 200 families.⁷ Over the next decade or so, however, natural growth combined with immigration to bring about a significant change. Not only did total numbers increase, but new centres emerged. Arisaig and Antigonish, for instance, were scarcely mentioned in the earliest reports, whereas by 1803 the priest in that area was said to be responsible for 2,000 souls.⁸ Eventually, places such as Sydney, Guysborough, Saint John and Charlottetown also became important. The congregation at Halifax, which had already been large, seems to have doubled between 1801 and 1814.⁹ By 1816 the total Catholic population of mainland Nova Scotia was reported to have reached

Mullowney, John Cody, John Murphy, John McDonel, and Edmund Phelan; a letter of 24 May 1785 includes three of the five men already mentioned but also John Stealing and Mark Mullen: 312 CN, II, #29, #2, Archives of the Archdiocese of Quebec [AAQ], Quebec City. Separate documents identify John Mullowney as a sea captain and merchant, John Murphy as a farmer, John Stealing as a merchant: *ibid.*, I, #37, II, #21. Edmund Phelan was identified as a merchant and owner of many houses: Edmund Burke Papers, Archives of the Archdiocese of Halifax; and Mark Mullen as a tobacconist: RG1, vol. 190, p. 325, Public Archives of Nova Scotia [PANS]. It is clear that Murphy was in the city by 1749 or shortly after: T.B. Akins, *Selections From the Public Documents of the Province of Nova Scotia*, p. 657. Mullowney arrived in 1753: Colonial Office Series 217, vol. 14, #126, Public Record Office, London. John Cody was there by 1765: RG1, vol. 211, p. 437, PANS.

5 RG1, vol. 222, #91, #92, #93, vol. 301, #83, PANS.

6 *Nova Scotia Statutes*, 23 Geo. III, cap. 9.

7 J.M. Bourg to Bishop D'Esglis, 3 October 1785, quoted in *Mémoire sur les Missions de la Nouvelle-Ecosse de 1760 à 1820* (Quebec, 1855), pp. 38-9; William Phelan to D'Esglis, 18 May 1787, 312 CN, VI, #2, AAQ; Phelan to D'Esglis, 16 August 1787, 312 CN, VI, #4, AAQ; and Jones to [Hubert?], 20 January 1790, 312 CN, I, #22, AAQ.

8 "Visite Pastorale de Mgr. Denaut en Acadie en 1803", *Bulletin des Recherches Historiques*, vol. X, no. 10 (October 1904), p. 295. An additional 700 people in Cape Breton were also under his care.

9 Burke to Plessis, 13 June 1814, 312 CN, IV, #91, AAQ.

32 *Acadiensis*

8,500 and that of Cape Breton 7,000.¹⁰ Between 1816 and 1830 the change was still more dramatic. In 1828 accounts sent to Rome gave the number of Catholics in mainland Nova Scotia as 25,000; Cape Breton had an additional 15,000, New Brunswick 21,500, and Prince Edward Island 12,500.¹¹

Besides the rapid expansion of the population, the Catholic community also took on an increasingly pluralistic character. Because of the arrival of large numbers of Irish and Scots, it was no longer limited mainly to Acadians and native people but included many English-speaking and Gaelic-speaking Catholics as well. For those charged with the pastoral care of Maritime Catholics, this meant that services had to be supplied in three or four languages. Allowances also had to be made for very different national traditions; and the difficulties were heightened even further by the fact that Catholics of different ethnic backgrounds did not find it easy to cooperate. They did not mix well and were very seldom content to be served by the same priests. Each group made its own demands on the Bishop of Quebec, whose burden was therefore greatly increased.

The anomalous position of the Maritimes in the vast diocese of Quebec was another key element in the difficult situation of Catholics. From a canonical point of view, the Maritime colonies were fully a part of the diocese and had been so since its foundation in 1674. In practical terms, however, a distinction had always been made between the interior of the diocese and the more remote regions, which were treated in effect as missionary outposts. This became even more true after the British conquest of Quebec, which from an ecclesiastical point of view was more decisive for the Maritimes than the earlier conquest of Acadia. A great strain was placed on the resources of the diocese, as many French-born priests left Canada, and the religious orders were prevented by the government from accepting new recruits. The total number of priests dropped sharply and did not begin to recover until the 1790s.¹² Thus the bishops of Quebec were least able to meet the needs of the Maritimes at just the time when

10 Burke to Secretary of Propaganda, 12 February 1816, Scrittura Riferite nei Congressi, II, fol. 261, *Archivio della Sacra Congregazione 'de Propaganda Fide'* [APF], Rome.

11 Acta of 1829, fols. 248-261, APF. The total population of New Brunswick according to the 1824 census was 74,176; the 1827 census of Nova Scotia gives the population of the mainland counties as 123,630: *Census of Canada 1870-71*, vol. 4, pp. 84, 94. When the results of this census were published in *The Novascotian*, 3 April 1828, an estimate of 20,000 was added for the population of Cape Breton. T.C. Haliburton, *An Historical and Statistical Account of Nova Scotia* (2 vols., Halifax, 1829), vol. 2, pp. 276-8, estimates the Cape Breton population as 30,000. The 1833 census of Prince Edward Island gives the total population as 32,292: *Irish University Press Series of British Parliamentary Papers: Colonies, Canada*, vol. 16, p. 83. The only census from this period which breaks down the population by religious affiliation is that of mainland Nova Scotia. It gives the number of Catholics in 1827 as 20,401, compared to the figure of 25,000 sent to Rome in 1829.

12 On the situation of the Church in Quebec after 1759, see M. Trudel, *L'Eglise canadienne sous le Régime militaire: 1759-1764* (2 vols.; Québec, 1956, 1957), I, *passim*; and H. Plante, *L'Eglise Catholique au Canada* (Trois Rivières, 1970), pp. 177 ff.

the population began to increase rapidly. For a generation after the Conquest, they continued to rely on the system used during the French era, which rested on the appointment of a priest from within the diocese as vicar-general to supervise the region on their behalf. Yet each vicar had at most one or two missionaries working under him. Long periods elapsed when large areas, such as the whole of mainland Nova Scotia, were without a single resident clergyman.

This situation began to improve gradually between 1785 and 1790, when a shift took place away from reliance on Canadian priests and toward the use of foreign clergy. The importance of this change has not always been fully appreciated, and clerical historians have been slow to recognize that the initial impetus came from laymen. The crucial part, however, was played by the same circle of Halifax Catholics who had already achieved a measure of relief from the penal code. Acting as a self-appointed committee of trustees, they constructed the first Catholic church in the city and launched a campaign to obtain a resident clergyman. It appears that there were at this time only two priests serving in the whole of the Maritimes — the Gaelic-speaking James MacDonald on Prince Edward Island (who died in 1785) and the Acadian-born Joseph-Mathurin Bourg, vicar-general for the area, who resided at Tracadie (now Carleton, P.Q.) from which he served the entire Bay of Chaleurs region. The Bishop of Quebec responded to the appeal for a clergyman at Halifax by ordering Bourg to move there. Before arrangements could be completed, however, the trustees decided that it was essential to have an English-speaking priest. Entirely on their own initiative, and without the bishop's knowledge, they obtained the services of James Jones, a Capuchin from Cork.¹³ Jones was the first English-speaking Catholic missionary to serve in Nova Scotia.

Once events had been set in motion, the consequences were felt throughout the entire region. James Jones came to Halifax in 1785, bearing instructions from his former bishop, Butler of Cork, to encourage Bishop D'Esglis of Quebec to apply for additional Irish priests. Butler apparently was prepared to send more men from his own diocese and was convinced that other Irish bishops would do the same.¹⁴ In the meantime, however, Father Bourg had been urging a separate scheme on D'Esglis. As a way of developing a body of English-speaking clergy to work in the Maritimes, he recommended placing Jones in charge of obtaining them and also of supervising them after they had arrived.¹⁵ He seems to have envisaged these missionaries as a distinct group who would serve the English-speaking and Gaelic-speaking communities, while the Acadian settlements and the overall supervision of the area would be left to Canadian priests. D'Esglis

13 Halifax trustees to Jones, 24 May 1785, 312 CN, II, #2, AAQ.

14 Jones to D'Esglis, 4 September 1785, 312 CN, I, #3, AAQ. This project collapsed when Butler unexpectedly succeeded to an Irish peerage. Evidently concerned that the title would die with him, he applied for a dispensation to marry. When this was refused, he resigned his see and took a distant relative as his wife. Not long afterward, he conformed to the Established Church.

15 Bourg to D'Esglis, 3 October 1785, quoted in *Mémoire sur les missions*, pp. 38-9.

did not at first take up the proposal, possibly because he was waiting for further word from Butler. When all hope from that quarter had vanished, however, he returned to it and used it as the cornerstone of a more radical plan. Instead of agreeing merely to employ English-speaking priests, he decided to place the region entirely in their care. To this end, he appointed Jones as Superior of the Missions, with jurisdiction over virtually the whole of the Maritimes.¹⁶ In the instructions issued with the appointment, it was made clear to Jones that henceforth English-speaking clergy were the “only resource” for the territory entrusted to his care. Even the Acadians would have to be content with them.¹⁷

This change in policy toward the Maritime colonies marked an important first step in the establishment of Maritime Catholicism. Several new priests came into the region during Jones’ term of office. They included not only Irish but also Scots and eventually French *émigrés*. No Canadian missionaries were appointed for a period of 15 years, but in spite of this the total number of clergymen increased from three in 1785 to ten in 1800. Moreover, this increase in numbers also allowed the crucial transition to begin from a system of itinerant missionaries to one which relied mainly on resident priests. Congregations throughout the region were placed on a more stable footing; and at least a degree of effective church government was introduced.

By 1800, however, the shortcomings of the arrangements introduced by D’Esglis were becoming apparent. Most of the men who came to work under Jones did so purely by individual agreement. Although the number of clergy had increased in the short term, the Maritimes still lacked an effective method of ensuring a continuous supply of reliable priests. There was no guarantee that others would follow in the footsteps of the missionaries who had arrived between 1785 and 1800. On the contrary, many of these missionaries had been available only because of transient circumstances, as in the case of the French *émigrés*. Meanwhile, there was a danger that even Irish priests would become harder to obtain. Most of the continental colleges, where Irish seminarians had previously been trained, had been suppressed in the course of the Revolution, giving rise to fears that a shortage might result in Ireland itself. The College of Maynooth had been founded near Dublin in 1795, but it was not clear whether it could prove adequate to compensate. James Jones took an anxious if not pessimistic view of circumstances at the end of his career. On 8 March 1801 he wrote to the co-adjutor bishop, J.-O. Plessis: “My mind is harassed about the future of these missions . . . were it not for the French Revolution, where would missionaries be found? Even the few scampering Irish priests, wh[o] might resort to America, will soon be no more. The C[atholic] College founded by [the] government will not supply Ireland itself in a few years, and all our establishments in France, Flanders &c are done away! What is to keep up the missions of N[ova] Scotia &c?”¹⁸

16 D’Esglis to Jones, 20 October 1787, Registre D, fol. 95, AAQ.

17 [Gravé?] to Jones, 22 October 1787, Vicaires généraux, I, #40, AAQ.

18 Jones to Plessis, 8 March 1801, 90 CM, I, #19, AAQ. Jones’ fears were not groundless. Indeed,

Jones' successor, Edmund Burke, is sometimes given credit for placing the Maritime missions on a sounder footing,¹⁹ but the fact is that the area would have suffered a net decline in the total number of missionaries if the bishop had not resumed the practice of appointing Canadian priests. Thirteen such appointments were made between 1800 and 1817,²⁰ at which time eight Canadian missionaries were still active in the Maritimes.²¹ There was no question at this stage of reverting to total dependence on the Canadians, but between 1800 and 1830 they worked alongside Irish, Scotch, and French priests and thus played a much greater role than they had between 1785 and 1800. Even so, the total number of clergymen increased only gradually,²² much more slowly than the expansion of the population.

Furthermore, so long as there was a problem with quantity, there was also a problem with quality. An area such as the Maritimes, desperately in need of clergy but far removed from the immediate supervision of a bishop, was very vulnerable to irregular clergy who were searching for a place to establish themselves. These "adventurers" or "clerical vagabonds" were often, though not always, members of religious orders. For reasons that were usually obscure, they had left their houses or native dioceses and struck out on their own. When they arrived in the new world, little was known of them, and they sometimes even lacked proper credentials. Yet their services were accepted because of the urgent need for priests. Serious disciplinary problems arose, and these problems in turn placed a great strain on the meagre resources of the region. Time and effort which could have been put to constructive purposes were devoted instead to

recent research indicates that the number of Irish priests in relation to the Irish population had begun to decline even before the closing of the continental colleges. See Sean Connolly, *Priests and People in Pre-Famine Ireland: 1780-1845* (New York, 1982) pp. 32-3.

19 See John Moir, *Church and State in Canada: 1627-1867* (Toronto, 1967), p.46.

20 The Bay of Chaleurs region is not included here, since it had been outside Jones' jurisdiction and remained even afterwards on a more or less special footing. Some settlements around the Bay of Fundy had also been excluded from his territory, but for practical purposes these passed under his authority with the appointment of an Irish priest, Thomas Power, to Memramcook in 1794. Madawaska is included in the count since its missionaries were sometimes given general responsibility for the Saint John River valley. The Rev. André Doucet is not counted among the Canadian priests appointed to the Maritimes because he left Quebec without permission and because Bishop Plessis ceased to regard him as a priest of the diocese.

21 They were A. Gagnon, L. Marcoux, L. Brodeur, J.L. Beaubien, P. Mignault, A. Manseau, R. Gaulin, J.E. Morissette.

22 Between 1800 and 1817, four French *émigrés* left, while only two arrived to replace them. Of these, one (G. Champion) succumbed to blindness and died in 1808. The other (F. Ciquard) served a longer term; but by 1817 the only refugee priest left in the area was the Abbé Sigogne at Baie Sainte Marie. A number of Irish clergymen came into the region during these years, but only one among them (Edmund Burke) served on a regular basis for an extended period of time. Most of the others became embroiled in controversy and left relatively quickly. After Burke, the next important acquisition of an Irish priest came with the appointment of William Dollard as assistant at Arichat in 1817, but strictly speaking, Dollard was a priest of the diocese of Quebec. The number of Scottish missionaries increased very slowly — from two to three.

dealing with unruly clergymen. The experience of the Maritimes was in this respect very similar to that of Newfoundland, Upper Canada, and the United States.²³

Probably the most important case of clerical misconduct in the Maritimes was that of the Irish secular priest, William Phelan.²⁴ Phelan was in many ways the *enfant terrible* of Maritime Catholicism; and his impact was all the more disruptive because it occurred at a very early stage of development. He reached Nova Scotia just a year after James Jones and was only the second Irish priest to serve in the area. From the outset, his appearance was suspicious, for he had come to the region uninvited and unannounced and (even more important) unable to offer a convincing explanation of why he had left his native diocese of Ossory. But Jones, too eager to have help, overlooked these circumstances. He employed Phelan briefly as his assistant in Halifax and afterwards stationed him at Arichat. Complaints soon poured in regarding Phelan's conduct. Instead of remaining in his appointed district, he wandered all over the region, preying upon people who were otherwise without priests. Everywhere he went, he made excessive financial demands, apparently using a schedule of fees which included the following items: eight dollars for a marriage, two dollars for a burial, the same for a high mass, and a dollar a head for communion. The practice of charging for communion was a corruption of an earlier custom of levying dues at the rate of one dollar per communicant. Phelan's invidious conduct caused an uproar, but Jones' intervention only provoked counter-attacks from Phelan, who refused to acknowledge his authority. Phelan's insubordination was an even more serious problem than his greed, for it threatened to upset the nascent attempt to establish stable church government in the Maritimes. The conflict between Jones and Phelan dominated the affairs of the church in the region in the years following 1790. Eventually, Jones suspended him, but even this did not solve the problem immediately. Phelan stayed on at Arichat, violated his suspension, and later turned for his living to fishing. Around 1794 he finally left for the United States, where he died shortly afterwards.

Other examples of misbehaviour by clergymen could be cited, involving in some cases the abuse of alcohol, in others sexual impropriety, and in still others financial chicanery and insubordination similar to Phelan's. The general consen-

23 For examples of such problems in the United States, see James Hennesey, S.J., *American Catholics: A History of the Roman Catholic Community in the United States* (Oxford, 1981), especially chapters VII and VIII. On Newfoundland, see "Edmund Burke" and "James Louis O'Donel", *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, V (Toronto, 1983), pp. 122-3, 631-3. Problems of clerical discipline in Upper Canada are described in Murray W. Nicolson, "Ecclesiastical Metropolitanism and the Evolution of the Catholic Archdiocese of Toronto", *Histoire sociale/Social History*, XV, 29 (May 1982), pp. 139-40.

24 For a detailed account of Phelan's activities and of his conflict with James Jones, see Terrence Murphy, "James Jones and the Establishment of Roman Catholic Church Government in the Maritime Provinces", *Canadian Catholic Historical Association, Study Sessions*, vol. 48 (1981), pp. 26-42.

sus, even at the time, was that Irish clergymen were the most frequent offenders,²⁵ but individual problems arose in connection with Scottish, French, and even Canadian priests.²⁶ They occurred both before and after 1800 and reflect the generally unsettled state of the Catholic Church in the region. Their significance lies not in the scandalous details but in the way they illustrate the need for institutional maturity. The problem of clerical discipline could not be reduced to manageable proportions until the Maritimes had local bishops and their own facilities for training priests.

Conflict between clergy and laity was also a major problem of this period. In the uncertain environment of the time, disputes arose easily but were very hard to quell. They can be traced in part to the poor quality of some priests, but the background of the population is also a crucial consideration. In the late 18th and even early 19th centuries, a large number of Maritime Catholics had been many years without the regular services of a clergyman. This was true not only of the Acadians who had returned to the region following the peace of 1763, but also of such groups as disbanded soldiers among the Irish and Scots. Recent studies strongly suggest that it is a mistake to assume that immigrants direct from Ireland were in the habit of regular church attendance; one researcher has argued that the mass of Irish people did not become “practising Catholics” until after 1850.²⁷ A result of all this for the Maritimes was that a large portion of the Catholic inhabitants were unaccustomed to ecclesiastical regulations. Newly arrived missionaries, especially from Quebec, saw an urgent need to impose discipline. But what the clergy considered necessary rules, the people often regarded as interference with their established customs. They were in some respects unruly but in others fiercely independent and self-reliant.

25 This view was taken even by some Irish priests. James Jones, in the wake of the Phelan affair and also as a result of his disappointment with a fellow Irish Capuchin, Laurence Whelan, assured Bishop Hubert: “I will send for no one from Ireland. I have had enough of those gentlemen!”: Jones to Hubert, 3 November 1792, 312 CN, I, #42, AAQ. Jones was referring here specifically to his attempt to find a successor for himself, but his statement is nonetheless striking in view of the fact that his original assignment was to recruit Irish priests. For an independent view, see Angus MacEachern’s letter of 18 September 1832 to A. MacDonald: “They [the Irish] study at home in the parish schools, pass to America, when their own Bishops will not employ them; and the consequences are fatal. Poor Bishop Macdonnell of Upper Canada has had his hands full of bad members”: The Archives of the Scots College, Rome, copy in Archives of the Diocese of Charlottetown [ADC]. Likewise, Bishop Plessis wrote to MacEachern on 15 March 1822: “No one is more on guard than I against Irish adventurers and ‘coureurs’, who are generally the rejects of their dioceses. . .”: “Bishops: 1799-1857”, #19, ADC.

26 For example, the Scottish priest Colin Grant (see Fraser to A. MacDonald, 28 December 1831, Archives of the Scots College, Rome, copy in ADC); the French Dominican, Father LeDru (see D’Esglis to Bourg, 15 October 1787, Copies des lettres, V, fol. 299, AAQ); and the Canadian priest, Janvier LeClerc (see Burke to Plessis, 2 February 1819, 312 CN, IV, #138, AAQ).

27 Emmet Larkin, “The Devotional Revolution in Ireland: 1850-1875”, *American Historical Review*, vol. 77, no. 3 (June 1972), pp. 625-52. See also David Miller, “Irish Catholicism and the Great Famine”, *Journal of Social History*, vol. 9, no. 1 (Fall 1975), pp. 81-98.

By far the most common cause of conflict was the alleged failure of the people to provide their priests with adequate support. The rules of the diocese of Quebec imposed very definite obligations in this respect, but the clergy complained constantly that the people were slow to comply, while the people insisted, on some occasions at least, that the clergy asked too much. Genuine poverty was no doubt part of the problem, as was the resentment caused by the blatant profiteering of men such as Phelan. Yet even more basic was the fact that many Catholics in the region had not been called upon for several years to support a clergyman.²⁸ The responsibility of doing so was unfamiliar and therefore an unwelcome burden. Besides this, the laity sometimes felt that the demands of the clergy were not commensurate with the services actually rendered. This was especially so if the priest was absent from the community for long periods while he visited other settlements. In one such case, the inhabitants of Baie Sainte Marie wrote to the French Dominican, Father LeDru, appointed as their pastor in 1786 but frequently away on unauthorized missionary tours, that they had applied for a priest to replace him and that they would make no expenditure in his favour until the bishop had answered their request.²⁹

Still another dimension of the problem was the absence of a uniform procedure for raising funds. In some places (especially among the Acadians) the tithe or a variation of the tithe was used; in others a voluntary system prevailed. Even within these two approaches, however, many basic issues remained undecided, including the question of whether each family should contribute equally or according to its means. Resistance to the financial demands of the clergy continued to be widespread in spite of heavy sanctions imposed by the bishop or by the local missionary acting on the bishop's authority. Individual non-contributors were sometimes denied the sacraments, and in more serious cases, entire communities were deprived of the services of a priest.³⁰

Missionaries coming into the region were also concerned about what seemed to them abuses in the social life of the inhabitants. Irregular marriages, contracted in the absence of priests, were a common cause of complaint.³¹ The relationships in question appear to have been quite stable, but they violated canon law. The parties were frequently relatives of a closer degree than was permitted by the Church, and the marriages themselves had been contracted sometimes before justices of the peace, sometimes before Protestant clergy, and sometimes

28 For Scottish Catholics this was true even in their homeland, since Scotland was at this time a missionary country for Catholics.

29 Inhabitants of Baie Sainte Marie to LeDru, 8 July 1787 [copy], 312 CN, V, #85, AAQ.

30 MacEachern to Plessis, 5 October 1818, 310 CN, I, #67, AAQ; and Plessis to George Taylor [at Miramichi], 21 May 1824, *Registre des lettres*, vol. 11, p. 509, AAQ. Plessis had previously removed Joseph Morissette from Miramichi and now threatened to do the same with William Dollard.

31 See Lejamtel to Plessis, 2 October 1799, 312 CN, VI, #31, AAQ; and also Plessis to the Catholic Inhabitants of Saint John, 26 February 1816, *Registre H*, fol. 116, AAQ.

simply before witnesses from the community. Procedures existed whereby a missionary could “rehabilitate” or regularize such marriages, but the process required a compulsory period of separation — a stipulation with which the couple was not always willing to comply. Issues of this kind seemed extremely important to the clergy, because they believed that it was not only the particular regulation but also their general authority which was at stake.

By the same token, missionaries were determined to uproot certain pastimes or forms of entertainment which they considered immoral. Saturday night “frolics” were one major target. Such gatherings were a very popular diversion in the outsettlements, but in the eyes of many priests they were associated with excessive drinking, riotous behaviour, and undue familiarity between the sexes.³² In all matters of this sort, one has to allow for clerical prudishness and exaggeration, yet the testimony of missionaries is too consistent to ignore. Heavy drinking and brawling were undoubtedly a problem. The same is true of the drunkenness which, according to the clergy, occurred on religious holidays and at funerals, weddings, and christenings. In some settlements, the original purpose of such occasions seemed to have been lost. One priest claimed that Christmas, Easter, and even Pentecost had been transformed from days of religious observance into “occasions for debauchery”.³³ After reading his report, the bishop authorized him to suppress certain religious feasts.³⁴ To abolish customs of which the clergy disapproved, various other methods were tried, including the public expulsion of offenders from the chapel.³⁵

No reliable figures are available concerning the rate of church attendance in the Maritimes. The only information we have is contained in the irregular and often fragmentary reports of missionaries. On the basis of existing evidence, however, it seems likely that what was more widespread than actual non-attendance was resistance to full participation in the sacraments. Even though missionaries sometimes mentioned people who did not come to church, the far more common complaint was that large numbers of inhabitants failed to make their Easter duty. As late as 1829, for instance, this applied to more than half the eligible communicants in the Acadian village of Arichat.³⁶ It was therefore probably common to encounter a sort of “nominal” Catholic, who was often, if not always, present at Sunday Mass but who seldom, if ever, went to confession or communion.

Tensions between priests and people were not restricted to one or another

32 See Gaulin to Plessis, 8 September 1818, Iles de la Madeline, #47, AAQ.

33 Lejantel to Plessis, 10 June 1807, 312 CN, VI, #47, AAQ.

34 Plessis to Lejantel, 19 July 1807, *Registre des lettres*, vol. 4, p. 249, AAQ.

35 Manseau to Plessis, 2 January 1817, 312 CN, II, #145, AAQ. For similar problems and comparable penalties imposed by the bishop in Quebec, see J.P. Wallot, “Religion and French Canadian Mores in the Early Nineteenth Century”, *Canadian Historical Review*, LII, 1 (March 1971), pp. 76-90.

36 Roy to Panet, 22 June 1829, 312 CN, VI, #97, AAQ.

ethnic group, but can be detected among all the Catholics of the region. If there was an exception, it was probably the native people, whose missions were poorly organized but who nevertheless seem to have been relatively acquiescent in their attitude to the clergy. Irish, Acadians, and Scots, on the other hand, all displayed their independence at one time or another. Among missionaries, Irishmen were known for unruliness, but Acadians had a reputation for obstinacy, and Scots were accused of shabbiness in their churches and worship. All three groups, moreover, were at times considered slow to contribute to the clergy, and all three resisted unfamiliar ecclesiastical discipline.

The independent attitude of Maritime Catholics had some important positive features, including a determination on the part of the Catholic inhabitants to have an active voice in their affairs. The long absence of priests had in this sense engendered lay initiative. Thrown back on their own resources, some communities had built their own churches, organized their own rudimentary worship, and even taken steps to obtain their own priests. The spirit of self-reliance which developed as a result carried over into the era when most settlements had resident clergymen. One of its chief expressions was to be found in the election of lay wardens to share with the priest in the administration of the church's temporal affairs. In some cases (notably Halifax) the wardens were the "founding fathers" of the parish establishment and also acted as civil trustees. This meant that church property was registered in their names, rather than in the name of the bishop or priest,³⁷ and this circumstance sometimes gave them a degree of leverage in asserting their authority. It is difficult to tell whether the practice of electing wardens was universal in the Maritimes, but it was certainly widespread. It contrasts very sharply with the negligible place given to Catholic laymen in later years. Nevertheless, church wardens soon became an object of criticism in their own right, even among the laity. The procedures for electing them were far from democratic, and they were as capable as any priest of tyrannizing the average parishioner.

One area where Catholics seemed to experience sweeping changes without suffering major setbacks was in their relationship to the rest of Maritime society. Between 1780 and 1830, the position which Catholics occupied in the eyes of the law underwent a total change. At the beginning of the period, Catholicism had the status of a proscribed religion; by the end, it was totally free.³⁸ Furthermore, the change was achieved with relatively little opposition.

37 See 312 CN, II, #21, #29, AAQ. Bugey has drawn attention to a similar phenomenon among Protestant dissenters, who were forced to register church land in the name of prominent members of the congregation because corporate status was permitted only to congregations of the Established Church: Bugey, "Churchmen and Dissenters", p. 87. This legal disability may have influenced Catholics as well, but in their case the most significant point is that land was held by members of the congregation as opposed to the bishop or the parish priest acting as his representative.

38 See James Garner, "The Enfranchisement of Roman Catholics in the Maritimes", *Canadian Historical Review*, XXXIV (September 1953), pp. 203-18; Sister Mary Liguori, "Haliburton

The obstacles that were encountered were mostly of a technical nature and were easily overcome. The granting of relief generally followed the pattern of emancipation in Britain, although in Nova Scotia at least the legislature showed itself willing to proceed at a faster rate. On two occasions, this resulted in its measures being held up until they were brought in line with the policy of the home government.³⁹ Eventually, however, the penal code was completely dismantled, and the civil disabilities under which Catholics had laboured were lifted. Final emancipation came in 1830, when the tests were removed which had previously excluded Catholics from the legislature, the bar, and high government office.

Emancipation was an important aspect of the development of Maritime Catholicism, but it has received a disproportionate amount of attention. Improvements in the law could solve only those problems which arose from legal restrictions. With most of the difficulties which were experienced in the Maritimes this was not really the case. The penal code had never been strictly enforced, and it was at most a small part of the explanation for such basic problems as the shortage of priests. The real reason why only a handful of missionaries came to the region was that the Bishop of Quebec had so few to send. By the same token, the shortage lasted long after the relief act of 1783. The removal of legal obstacles did not always mean that Catholics were able to take advantage of their new freedom. They lacked adequate internal resources. What was true of the supply of clergy applied equally to areas such as education. Catholics were legally permitted to operate schools any time after 1786; but a centre as important as Halifax was without one until around 1819.

Even the specifically political gains of Catholics may be much less straightforward than often assumed. Catholics were granted the right to vote in Nova Scotia in 1789, but the same election act which brought about this change also retained the 40-shilling franchise, albeit in a modified form.⁴⁰ In the absence of polling lists, it is far from clear how many Catholics actually qualified as electors at this early date. Similarly, the removal of the test oaths which had barred Catholics from office was an important breakthrough, but its effects were not really felt until after 1830. The years between 1780 and 1830 were at most a period of political "incubation" for Maritime Catholics. To achieve emancipation Catholics had to rely largely on the support of sympathetic Protestants. It was not until later in the century that they emerged as a powerful political force

and the Uniackes: Protestant Champions of Catholic Liberty", *Canadian Catholic Historical Association, Report* (1953), pp. 37-48; D.J. Rankin, "Laurence Kavanagh", *Canadian Catholic Historical Association, Report* (1940-41), pp. 51-76.

39 The first occasion was a relief bill of 1782, the provisions of which were more lenient than the comparable measure passed in Britain in 1778. The bill was disallowed, but it was revised slightly and in its new form passed the following year: *Nova Scotia Statutes*, 23 Geo. III, cap. 9. The second occasion occurred in 1827, when a bill was passed to abolish the test oaths. The bill was held up in London until the Emancipation Act of 1829 was passed by the imperial parliament.

40 James Garner, *The Franchise and Politics in British North America: 1755-1867* (Toronto, 1969), pp. 20-1.

42 *Acadiensis*

in their own right.

On the whole, the relationship between the church and the government was a very harmonious one. The clergy in particular obtained numerous favours and concessions, giving them not only the freedom they needed to carry out their functions but also at times semi-official support. Missionaries were often paid government salaries;⁴¹ and the civil authorities backed them in their struggles with unruly congregations. For example, an eyewitness tells us that James Jones would have been unable to control his rebellious parishioners if it had not been for his influence with people in high places.⁴² Government officials had a keen appreciation of the services which the clergy could render in return for such favours. They relied on them to maintain order and to instill respect for authority; they also employed them as intermediaries in dealing with Indians, Acadians, and immigrants.⁴³ Catholic clergy were valued for their essentially conservative attitude, and on these grounds they were often preferred to Protestant dissenters and "enthusiasts".⁴⁴

Isolated cases of conflict were exceptions to the rule. They tended to occur on the rare occasions when Catholics seemed to threaten the Anglican establishment. Perhaps the most serious incident took place when Edmund Burke attempted to found a Catholic college.⁴⁵ His project was vehemently opposed by

41 James Jones obtained a salary of £50 per annum, partly through the good graces of the Duke of Kent: Jones to Hubert, 4 August 1796, 312 CN, I, #61, AAQ. There is also clear evidence of stipends being paid to missionaries to the Indians in both New Brunswick (Madawaska and St. Anne) and Cape Breton (Bras d'Or): see Plessis to Hunter, 7 September 1808, *Registre des lettres*, vol. 6, p. 236, Douglas to Plessis, 8 April 1825, *Gouvernement*, II, #23, McSweeney to Panet, 30 September 1829, 311 CN, I, #42, AAQ; and Fraser to MacDonald, 8 October 1828, Archives of the Scots College, copy in ADC. In 1832, Bishop MacEachern of Charlottetown reported that both he and Bishop Fraser, Vicar-Apostolic of Nova Scotia, received government allowances; the amount in his case was \$200 and in Fraser's \$1,000: MacEachern to MacDonald, 9 April 1832, Archives of the Scots College, copy in ADC. See also Burke to Plessis, 28 July 1803 and 16 July 1804, 312 CN, III, #79, #84, AAQ, where Burke appears to refer to a government salary for himself.

42 Laurence Whelan to Hubert, 24 March 1792, 312 CN, VI, #17, AAQ.

43 The activities of Abbé Sigogne are the most striking, though not the only, illustration of this point. For examples of his role as an intermediary, see Provincial Secretary to Sigogne, 31 October 1808, vol. 140, p. 13, and Provincial Secretary to Sigogne, 1 August 1803, vol. 139, pp. 4-5, RG1, PANS; and Sigogne to Denaut, 8 March 1806, 312 CN, V, #58, AAQ.

44 See the letter of Governor Ainslie of Cape Breton to Bishop Plessis dated 23 March 1818: "I received the letter which your Reverence did me the honor to write on the 18th of October last respecting some assistance to the Mick Mak settlement in the Bras d'Or. I shall be at all times ready to give every encouragement in my power to missionaries who will instruct Indians or others in the duties of Christians, inculcating more especially loyalty to the King and attachment to the Mother Country, but shall be at least equally so to discourage the introduction of those pests of Society, and foes to Great Britain and Royalty, the Methodists. There is no danger of this kind from those of the creed of your Reverence, and my protection, limited in its extent, shall always be offered them": 312 CN, VII, #11, AAQ.

45 For a discussion of important aspects of this controversy, see Judith Tulloch, "Conservative

Bishop Inglis, who saw it as a challenge to the Anglican monopoly on higher education. Temporarily, the government put legal obstacles in Burke's way.⁴⁶ Burke was by far the most aggressive Catholic leader of the period, and when he deliberately ignored the restrictions, his open defiance provoked an official warning from the Governor.⁴⁷ Burke also attacked Inglis in print⁴⁸ and thereby sparked a pamphlet war, which before it had ended involved not just Anglicans and Catholics but also Presbyterians. Thomas McCulloch, the leading Presbyterian spokesman, contributed two tracts — *Popery Condemned* and *Popery Again Condemned*.⁴⁹ Burke's college never opened, but this had less to do with Protestant opposition or government interference than with the fact that Burke was unable to find teachers for his planned institution.⁵⁰

Another controversy with the government arose in Prince Edward Island in connection with Catholic missionaries performing marriages without the governor's licence. Although this practice had been tolerated for many years in all of the Maritime colonies, a newly appointed and over-zealous governor, Charles Douglas Smith, decided in 1813 to insist on the strict observance of the law.⁵¹ Angus MacEachern, the foremost clergyman on the island, refused to comply, stating that he would send his people to Nova Scotia to be married rather than give in.⁵² The outcome of the affair illustrated again the generally accommodating attitude of the government toward Catholics. Bishop Plessis, who supported MacEachern's stand, reported the matter to the Governor-General, Sir George Prevost,⁵³ who may in turn have raised it with Smith. Meanwhile, MacEachern himself reminded local officials of the loyal record of Catholics and pointed out that endless lawsuits might ensue if the validity of Catholic marriages was cast in doubt.⁵⁴ Within a year, the whole matter was laid to rest. MacEachern reported to Plessis that the governor denied ever having insisted on the controversial policy. "I hear no more of the Licence Doctrine", he wrote, "Matters

Opinion in Nova Scotia During an Age of Revolution, 1789-1815", M.A. thesis, Dalhousie University, 1972, pp. 66-79.

46 See Wentworth to Lord Hobart, 22 March 1802, RG1, vol. 53, p. 340, PANS; and Burke to Plessis, 21 September 1803, 312 CN, III, #81, AAQ.

47 Wentworth to Lord Hobart, 10 September 1802, RG1, vol. 53, pp. 371-2, PANS.

48 Edmund Burke, *Letter of Instruction to the Roman Catholic Missionaries of Nova Scotia and Its Dependencies* (Halifax, 1804). See especially the "Postscript".

49 Thomas McCulloch, *Popery Condemned by Scripture and the Fathers* (Edinburgh, 1808) and *Popery Again Condemned by Scripture and the Fathers* (Edinburgh, 1810).

50 Burke's attempts to find teachers for his college can be followed in his correspondence from 1802 to 1817. See, for instance, Burke to Plessis, 10 November 1806, 312 CN, III, #117, AAQ. For an example of the obstacles that he encountered, see Strickland to Burke, 31 July 1808, Burke Papers, Archives of the Archdiocese of Halifax, copy in PANS.

51 MacEachern to Plessis, 4 September 1813, 310 CN, I, #42, AAQ.

52 *Ibid.*

53 Plessis to MacEachern, 29 October 1813, *Registre des lettres*, vol. 8, p. 121, AAQ.

54 MacEachern to Plessis, 31 March 1815, 310 CN, I, #50, AAQ.

remain as they were".⁵⁵

In society in general, Catholics no doubt had to contend with anti-Catholic sentiment, and ordinary prejudice probably did as much as any external force to hamper their progress; yet relations between Catholics and Protestants were by no means always bad. Just as we encounter examples of bigotry, we also find indications of harmony and cooperation. One area in which Protestants actively assisted Catholics was in the construction of much-needed churches. In the cities, where the population was mixed, it was apparently quite common for Protestants to contribute to Catholic building funds. Thus a subscription of more than £400 was raised "among people of every persuasion" in Saint John in 1814,⁵⁶ while in Charlottetown a Protestant woman donated a building site.⁵⁷ The practice of Protestants contributing money was so widespread that Bishop Plessis anxiously ordered a stop to it for fear that Catholics would later be expected to reciprocate.⁵⁸ Protestants also attended sermons by the Catholic clergy,⁵⁹ many of whom were held in high esteem. Indeed, some converts were made,⁶⁰ although the numbers were probably not great. Generally, it may be said that sectarian strife, like serious tensions in politics, developed at a later date.⁶¹

The major problems of the Catholic community were internal ones, and Catholics themselves came more and more to recognize this. From about 1800, and especially after 1815, the major concern of leading clergymen in the region was to find ways by which Maritime Catholics could provide for their own needs. The education of clergy was an important element in this, because it seemed clear that the central problem of the supply of missionaries could never really be solved until the Maritimes were able to raise up their own priests. The goal of self-sufficiency seemed in turn to demand independence. Consequently,

55 *Ibid.*

56 Charles Ffrench to Plessis, 30 May 1815, 311 CN, VI, #143, AAQ.

57 J.-O. Plessis, "Journal de Deux Voyages Apostoliques dans le Golfe Saint-Laurent et les Provinces d'en bas, en 1811 et 1812", *Le Foyer Canadien*, III (1865), p. 221.

58 Plessis to Ffrench, 28 November 1815, *Registre des lettres*, vol. 8, p. 406, AAQ.

59 A report to Rome in 1786 says that James Jones preached twice every Sunday in Halifax and that "all followers of different sects without discrimination hasten to hear him": quoted in [Père Pacifique?], "Le premier missionnaire de langue anglais en Nouvelle Ecosse", *Bulletin de la Société de Géographie de Québec*, January 1932. See also Manseau to Plessis, 28 January 1817, 312 CN, II, #147, AAQ.

60 For examples, see McQuade to Plessis, 21 November 1816, 311 CN, II, #7, McKeagney to Plessis, 10 November 1825, 312 CN, VII, #33, McSweeney to Panet, 1 June 1828, 311 CN, I, #37, AAQ; and Fraser to A. MacDonald, 8 October 1828, Archives of the Scots College, copy in ADC.

61 For a description of anti-Catholic agitation in Nova Scotia in the 1840s and 1850s, see A.J.B. Johnston, "The 'Protestant Spirit' of Colonial Nova Scotia", M.A. thesis, Dalhousie University, 1977. Johnston attributes the increase in anti-Catholic sentiment largely to the growth of the Irish Catholic population, but he also takes into account such considerations as the influence of anti-Catholic campaigns in Canada, the United States, and Britain and the increasingly aggressive attitude of Catholics.

one of the major thrusts of the period between 1815 and 1830 was toward gradual separation from the diocese of Quebec.

Edmund Burke was undoubtedly the pioneer in this respect. Even before he came to the Maritimes, his experiences as a missionary in Upper Canada had convinced him of the necessity of dividing the diocese. In 1797 he had, on his own initiative, submitted a proposal to Rome, calling for the erection of a separate diocese in Montreal and the establishment of a vicariate-apostolic in Upper Canada.⁶² When Burke arrived in Nova Scotia, he pursued a very similar course. One of his first steps was to launch the plan for a Catholic college. He was determined to find the means to train local boys for the priesthood. The project was an extremely ambitious one, and Burke spared no effort to achieve it. In the meantime, he continued to work for the division of the diocese. In 1815 he went to Rome in person and appealed to the authorities to place Nova Scotia on an independent footing.⁶³ This time his proposal was accepted. Mainland Nova Scotia was erected as a vicariate with Burke himself as vicar-apostolic. As a normal part of this procedure, Burke was also consecrated bishop. His official title was Bishop of Sion and Vicar-Apostolic of Nova Scotia.⁶⁴

The manner in which Burke had achieved his goal was almost as significant as the accomplishment itself, for it was clearly intended to deceive Bishop Plessis. When he applied to Plessis for permission to go to Europe, he gave as his only reason the need to seek medical attention⁶⁵ — a circumstance to which he never referred again. He made no mention of a trip to Rome, let alone the submission of a proposal. Plessis, in fact, learned his true whereabouts only when he heard a rumour from a third party that Burke was in Italy.⁶⁶ In much the same way, he first heard of the proposed vicariate when the matter was virtually a *fait accompli*. A letter from the Cardinal Prefect of Propaganda announcing the decision⁶⁷ was entrusted to Burke. Burke forwarded it to Plessis on his return to

62 Lucien Lemieux, *L'Établissement de la Première Province Ecclésiastique au Canada: 1783-1844* (Montreal, 1967), pp. 37-40.

63 *Ibid.*, pp. 88-91.

64 To understand the course of events in the Maritimes it is essential to appreciate the fundamental difference between a vicar-general and a vicar-apostolic. A vicar-general derives his authority from a diocesan bishop and is normally (though not always) only a priest; a vicar-apostolic derives his authority directly from the Pope (hence the "apostolic") and is a bishop, though because his powers are vicarious rather than ordinary he does not bear the title of the territory under his jurisdiction. Instead, he is titular bishop of a diocese *in partibus infidelium* — in Burke's case "Sion". Burke was *not* Bishop of Nova Scotia, and indeed not a diocesan bishop at all; but his appointment meant that mainland Nova Scotia was completely separated from the diocese of Quebec.

65 Burke to Plessis, 20 March 1814, 312 CN, IV, #81, AAQ.

66 Plessis to Mignault, 18 August 1816, *Registre des lettres*, vol. 8, p. 530, AAQ.

67 Cardinal Litta to Plessis, 16 April 1816, *Registre H*, fol. 133, AAQ. Litta indicated that he would not proceed without Plessis' consent, but the fact remains that Plessis was consulted only after the decision had been made.

Nova Scotia, claiming disingenuously that he had no idea of its contents but that he believed it was an answer to an appeal which Plessis had submitted to Rome.⁶⁸

This behaviour sheds light on the element of suspicion and antagonism in Burke's attitude. He was convinced that the resources of the existing diocese of Quebec were overtaxed and that successive bishops had wrongfully neglected predominantly English-speaking areas such as the Maritimes. He also believed that they had resisted (and that Plessis would continue to resist) any reduction of the territory under their jurisdiction. Both of these ideas became increasingly prominent in the thinking of Maritime Catholic leaders during this period, and they fostered considerable resentment. Burke was clearly wrong about Plessis' policy toward separation. The truth is that the bishop had been working in his own way to achieve the same end.⁶⁹ Where he disagreed with Burke was not over the division of the diocese *per se* but over the manner in which it was to be accomplished. Since he was sceptical about Burke's ability to meet the needs of the region entirely on his own,⁷⁰ he believed that the erection of a regular diocese, suffragan to Quebec, was preferable to the creation of a vicariate.⁷¹ Even so, as soon as he received the announcement of the proposed vicariate, he signified to Burke his willingness to accept the change. He would be glad, he said, to have "one less province on his conscience".⁷² He also told Burke that he would be willing to allow the three Canadian priests⁷³ then serving in Nova Scotia to remain there if they wished — although he could no longer force them to do so. Within a year, however, all three had left.

Meanwhile, Burke seemed to have no effective plan to compensate for such losses. The closest he ever came to training his own clergy was when he gathered a handful of Irish seminarians in his house in order to supervise the completion of their studies. Six of these students were eventually ordained and employed in Nova Scotia.⁷⁴ But the whole arrangement was worked out only after the erection of the vicariate and quite possibly would not have occurred at all if it had

68 Burke to Plessis, 7 August 1816, 312 CN, IV, #107, AAQ.

69 Lemieux, *L'Etablissement*, pp. 61-3.

70 Plessis to Mignault, 29 January 1817, Plessis to Burke, 23 April 1817, *Registre des lettres*, vol. 9, pp. 102, 145, AAQ.

71 Plessis to Burke, 10 September 1816, *Registre des lettres*, vol. 8, p. 543, AAQ. Plessis had also wanted to achieve civil recognition as Bishop of Quebec before the separation took place. The Catholic bishops of Quebec were at this stage recognized by the government only as "Superintendents of the Romish Clergy".

72 Plessis to Burke, 10 September 1816, *Registre des lettres*, vol. 8, p. 543, AAQ.

73 They were P. Mignault, R. Gaulin, and A. Manseau. The total number of clergymen in the province at the time was eight.

74 T. Rice, D. Geary, J. Grant, J. Dunphy, J. Carroll, and J. Loughnan. See A.A. Johnston, *A History of the Catholic Church in Eastern Nova Scotia* (2 vols.; Antigonish, 1960-1971), I, p. 268, n. 1.

not been for a suggestion made by Plessis.⁷⁵

Burke also experienced great difficulty in finding someone able and willing to succeed him as vicar-apostolic. His first choice was Thomas Maguire, a native of Halifax who had become a priest of the diocese of Quebec. Burke wanted Maguire to be named as his co-adjutor with right of succession.⁷⁶ Plessis supported this scheme and wrote to Rome to recommend Maguire's appointment.⁷⁷ In spite of repeated entreaties, however, Maguire refused to accept the post.⁷⁸ Almost in desperation, Burke urged the Roman authorities to consider Father Paul Long, Rector of the Irish College in Rome.⁷⁹ But when Burke died in 1820 the vicariate was left vacant with no successor in sight. A difficult period of nearly seven years followed when Nova Scotia was without a bishop. During that time, it was administered by Burke's nephew, John Carroll, a newly ordained priest in his twenties.

Burke's success in achieving the separation of Nova Scotia encouraged others to pursue a similar course. In 1817 Alexander Macdonell, missionary at Kingston, travelled to London to promote the further dismemberment of the diocese. The plan which he put forward called for the erection of vicariates in five additional districts, including Upper Canada and Prince Edward Island. His proposal was well received by the British officials, who afterwards let it be known in Rome that they would put no obstacles in the way.⁸⁰ Propaganda then consulted Bishop Plessis.⁸¹ Plessis was asked not only for his views on the proposed vicariates but also for his estimate of Macdonell and Angus MacEachern as potential vicars-apostolic. He warmly recommended both men but advised against the creation of separate vicariates.⁸² Again he proposed the establishment of regular dioceses, with bishops suffragan to Quebec. Plessis believed that the regions concerned would be better off if they did not sever all their ties with the old diocese. It would be easier for them under such an arrangement to continue to use Canadian priests and thus avoid the sort of problems which had arisen in Nova Scotia. Unfortunately, however, Plessis' scheme also would have entailed the creation of an ecclesiastical province — a step which might go beyond what the government was ready to permit. Rome decided on a middle course. Macdonell and MacEachern were named bishops but only as vicars-general to Plessis; they would be neither vicars-apostolic nor diocesan bishops,

75 Plessis to Mignault, 29 January 1817, *Registre des lettres*, vol. 9, p. 102, AAQ.

76 Burke to Cardinal Litta, 21 December 1818, *Acta of 1819*, fol. 154, APF; and Burke to Plessis, 22 December 1818, 312 CN, IV, #136, AAQ.

77 Plessis to Cardinal Fontana, 16 April 1819, *Correspondance Manuscrite de Rome*, vol. 3, p. 155, AAQ.

78 Plessis to Burke, 24 December 1819, *Evêques de Québec*, vol. 3, p. 170, AAQ.

79 Burke to Cardinal Fontana, 19 September 1820, *Acta of 1824*, fols. 412-413, APF.

80 Lemieux, *L'Etablissement*, pp. 93-4.

81 *Ibid.*, p. 95.

82 Plessis to Cardinal Litta, 1 December 1817, *Registre des lettres*, vol. 9, pp. 285-7, AAQ.

but “vicars-general with episcopal character”. The regions under their jurisdiction would remain for the time being part of the diocese of Quebec. It was a highly unusual arrangement based on a precedent in Lithuania.⁸³

MacEachern, who under the new arrangement was given responsibility for the whole of the Maritimes except mainland Nova Scotia, was clearly disappointed that Rome had decided on such a limited step. He complained that as a vicar-apostolic he would have been free to use his own judgement and to cooperate effectively with Burke, but that as a mere vicar-general his hands were tied.⁸⁴ Joint projects seemed out of the question so long as he was subject to Quebec. MacEachern was more and more convinced, however, that the problems of the region could be solved only by local initiative. He grew disenchanted with the method of sending boys to study in Quebec seminaries, and like Burke he began to concentrate on founding his own college.⁸⁵ He also dwelt increasingly on the difficulties of communication between the Maritimes and the centre of the diocese and on the vast differences between the two regions.⁸⁶ He poured out his frustrations in long letters to the rectors of the Scots College in Rome, at first showing few signs of personal resentment but eventually allowing an element of bitterness to creep in. Whereas he had originally spoken of the bishops of Quebec as unable to provide much assistance,⁸⁷ he now spoke as if they were unwilling to do so.⁸⁸ A turning point was reached in 1825 when Bishop Plessis told him that he did not see any resources for his district save “those which you can draw from the children of the country”.⁸⁹ This was really nothing more than MacEachern already knew, but somehow it struck him at the time as an abdication on Plessis’ part of his responsibility for the Maritimes. “That expression in your letter. . .”, he told Plessis, “is mortifying! What has Canada

83 Lemieux, *L’Etablissement*, p. 119.

84 MacEachern to MacPherson, 9 November 1819, Archives of the Scots College, typescript in A.A. Johnston Collection, St. Francis Xavier University Library, Antigonish.

85 See, for example, MacEachern to MacPherson, 8 July 1824, Archives of the Scots College, copy in ADC; and MacEachern to Secretary of Propaganda, 8 July 1824, as quoted in Acta of 1824, fol. 571, APF.

86 MacEachern to MacPherson, 9 November 1819, Archives of the Scots College, typescript in Johnston Collection, St. Francis Xavier University Library; and MacEachern to Plessis, 14 February 1822, 310 CN, I, #81, AAQ.

87 MacEachern to MacPherson, 9 November 1819, Archives of the Scots College, typescript in Johnston Collection, St. Francis Xavier University Library: “The Bishop of Quebec has not one half the clergymen that could be employed with fruit, in his Diocese, and in less than 15 years the population will double”. See also MacEachern to Gagnon, 23 May 1822, Antoine Gagnon Papers, #128, Archives of the Diocese of Saint John: “The want of clergymen on these shores is lamentable, and I do not see how His Grace the Archbishop can better our condition”.

88 MacEachern to MacPherson, 8 July 1824, Archives of the Scots College, copy in ADC: “No effort was ever made by any B[ishop] in Canada to raise clergymen for our Highlanders. . . Neither did they send any Canadian priest to this Island since the Conquest until 1812”.

89 Plessis to MacEachern, 13 July 1825, *Registre des lettres*, vol. 12, p. 229, AAQ.

ever done for this Island since the Conquest?"⁹⁰ To Angus MacDonald in Rome, he wrote: "Why then, in the name of Almighty God, are we kept hanging after men who never cared about us more than they did, or do, about the Hottentots or the Siberians? The A[rch] B[ishop] and his Coadjutor know nothing about these vast regions. . . ."⁹¹

From about 1825, MacEachern actively campaigned for final separation from Quebec.⁹² He realized his goal in 1829, when Prince Edward Island and New Brunswick were erected as a diocese in their own right and Cape Breton was united to the vicariate of Nova Scotia.⁹³ The whole of the Maritimes was now separate from Quebec. Moreover, since William Fraser, Burke's eventual successor as vicar-apostolic of Nova Scotia, was a Scot, cooperation between him and MacEachern proved especially easy. With Fraser's approval, MacEachern soon opened a college at St. Andrew's, Prince Edward Island, intended mainly to prepare boys for the seminary. Due to a lack of resources, it lasted only 13 years, but 24 of its students eventually became priests.⁹⁴ MacEachern also tried to open a college in New Brunswick near Shediac, but that project failed. His educational ventures revealed that independence was not the panacea he had sometimes seemed to expect. Even so, the final separation of the Maritimes from the diocese of Quebec was a step so crucial that it marked the end of an era. Maritime Catholics had by no means solved all their problems, but henceforth they would face them on different terms.

90 MacEachern to Plessis, 17 October 1825, 310 CN, I, #95, AAQ.

91 MacEachern to A. MacDonald, 1 November 1828 [?], Archives of the Scots College, copy in ADC.

92 MacEachern to MacPherson, 31 August 1825, quoted in Acta of 1829, fols. 254-255, APF; and MacEachern to [Cardinal Prefect of Propaganda?], 31 August 1825, Archives of the Scots College, typescript in Johnston Collection, St. Francis Xavier University Library. The second of these letters was apparently meant to be forwarded by MacPherson to Rome. For a subsequent appeal by MacEachern, see his letter to the Secretary of Propaganda of 12 December 1826, as quoted in Acta of 1829, fols. 258-259, APF.

93 Lemieux, *L'Etablissement*, p. 261.

94 Laurence K. Shook, *Catholic Post-Secondary Education in English-Speaking Canada: A History* (Toronto, 1971), p. 38.