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## **Marginalization and the *raison d'être* of the French Reformed Christian in Quebec**

### **I. Introduction: Overwhelming Marginalization**

The French-Reformed Christian in Quebec is often viewed as a rather curious fellow. On one level it is hoped that he resembles his fellow reformed Christians in the rest of North America—he loves God and lives a life of gratitude for the great gift of salvation obtained in Jesus Christ. On this global confessional, theological level all Reformed Christians around the world strive for the same goal. Yet, on another level, the level of the practical living of this faith, the Reformed Christian in Quebec has quite a different experience. Although not completely different from the culture of the rest of North America, that of Quebec has its own substantially unique history. Such history poses very peculiar challenges to the Reformed Christian living the life of gratitude to God.

Most characteristic of these peculiar challenges is that the Reformed Christian of Quebec is marginalized in a way not experienced by other Reformed Christians in North America. Certainly, Reformed Christians in all places have their own specific burdens, but in Quebec it could generally be seen in an overwhelming cultural marginalization. Such can be seen on at least four levels (the discussion of which will take us across the pages of the religious history of Quebec):

1. The French Reformed Christian is a *Protestant* in an historically overwhelmingly *Roman Catholic* society.
2. The French Reformed Christian is *French*, in an overwhelmingly *English* continent.
3. For the last several generations the French Reformed Christian is *Reformed* in an overwhelmingly *Baptist* Protestant milieu.
4. Again, for the last several generations the French Reformed Christian is committed to a biblical moral standard in a society overwhelmingly post-modern.

Again, other Reformed Christians might face certain of these challenges, but, I would argue, not exactly or in the same overwhelming way.

### **II. *Protestant, not Catholic***

Our story begins at the birth of New France. It was in 1534 that the French Crown sent the explorer Jacques Cartier to find a western passage to Asia. What he found, rather, was a vast land rich with natural resources and populated by Native Canadians—especially in the villages of Stadacona (Quebec City) and Hochelaga (Montreal). He soon returned to Europe telling of the rich treasures. His major treasure was gold and diamonds—which turned out to be the worthless pyrite and quartz crystal. His other treasure was two Native Canadian boys which he

stole from chief Donnacona of the village Stadacona. Thankfully, he returned them to their father on his second expedition a year later. Cartier was the first of many French explorers to the New World. Besides Quebec the presence of the French Crown was in places such as Louisiana, Carolina and Florida. These other settlements, indeed all French settlements in North America would eventually be either taken or woven into the English and, later, American expansion. These other settlements are interesting, but our attention is on that of Cartier.

At the beginning of all French colonies, the Huguenots had a considerable presence. Some of the colonies south of the border were actually particularly Protestant—a fact which helped them more easily meld into English Protestant society. The settlements in Quebec were more particularly Catholic. In the beginning Huguenots were tolerated so long as they not become a public nuisance.

Historians have found many Huguenots among the earliest settlers and leaders. Witnesses say that Protestants would sing their “Marots” on board the ships crossing the ocean—“Marots” being the versified Psalms penned by Clement Marot with musique by Claude Goudimel.<sup>1</sup> Many of these Huguenots came from the areas with the strongest Huguenot presence—particularly those of the cities like La Rochelle, Rouen, Poitiers, and Toulouse. Among those with the dream to settle other Huguenot-friendly settlements was Huguenot leader admiral Gaspard de Coligny who, until the Portuguese warned by the Jesuits crushed this idea, dreamed of setting up a colony in Brazil. He tried once again in Florida, but it was the Spanish who chased the colonists away.

A notable Huguenot in the 16<sup>th</sup> century was Jean-François de la Roque de Roberval to whom King Francis I gave the reigns of the colony to in 1541 “for the augmentation and growth of our holy Christian faith and the Holy-mother Catholic Church.” Such is paradoxical for Roberval was clearly a Huguenot. The story is told that he was accepted as a promoter of the Catholic faith because all presumed that he would *eventually* become a Catholic. Roberval is perhaps the most notable Calvinist in the early history of Quebec. Yet, we should not be too eager to tout his name. After his failed attempt at colonization in Canada in the early 1540s, Roberval took up his old hobby of privateering—he was a pirate. He found the most work in the Caribbean against Spanish ships and towns, since France and Spain were at war. Known to the Spanish as Roberto Baal, he attacked and plundered several important Spanish colonies before returning to France. Upon his return he tried to consolidate his fortune, but ended up killed by an angry Catholic mob as he and a fellow Calvinist exited a Reformed worship service.

These early attempts at colonization, then, were not very successful. It would take until the next century for Samuel de Champlain to found the fortified fur-trading post of Quebec. Champlain first came to Canada in 1603 as a cartographer mapping out the St. Lawrence River. Very interestingly, it is thought that Champlain was himself a Huguenot covert to Catholicism.<sup>2</sup> Even more poignant is Champlain’s participation in the 1604 settlement of Sainte Croix, further up the St-Laurence River in the Bay of Fundy, with Pierre de Gua Seigneur des Monts. Pierre de Gua founded the colony taking along a Catholic Priest and, notably, *a Protestant Minister*. The colony, however, was rife with disease and internal problems—it did not last long. It was finally in 1608 that the French Crown officially established the city of Quebec as a colony of France. Fortifying the colony was his continual interest for the rest of Champlain’s life. Unfortunately, the first winter was very difficult, what with only 8 of the original 28 surviving the ravages of smallpox, scurvy or the snow. His interest continued in mapping out the territory of New

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<sup>1</sup> *Loups dans la bergerie*

<sup>2</sup> Bedard, Nouvelle France

France. Important on his list of priorities was the negotiations and influence on the native populations. At first Champlain let his colonists live by a ‘don’t ask, don’t tell’ policy, but became more closed as the colony grew.

Actually, the uneasy tolerance of the Huguenots was jeopardized with the arrival of the first members of the Jesuit order in 1625.<sup>3</sup> The reputation of the Jesuits as fiercely anti-Protestant and pro-Roman clearly preceded them. As first they were not even allowed to disembark off of their ship—the local government did not want to cause too much trouble. Finally, the other local Catholic order, the Recollets, vouched they would keep an eye on the Jesuits until the matter could be sorted out. Certainly, the growing general sentiment among the Catholic hierarchy in France and now in Quebec was that Huguenots by their very nature could not be faithful citizens. The Catholicity of the Church, Crown, and Empire was absolute—‘Une Foi, Une Loi, Un Roy’—‘One Faith, One Law, One King.’

No wonder, then, that in 1627 the charter of the colonies’ ‘Company of One Hundred Associates’ finally and clearly forbid a Protestant presence. Clearly the King decreed in New France what he was trying to do with Huguenots in France herself—get rid of them. It was in 1628 that Louis XIII with the Cardinal Richelieu captured the Huguenot city of LaRoche on the Atlantic coast of France. Subsequently, at the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century the Edict of Nantes which had granted Huguenots some measure of toleration was revoked and Protestantism entered its darkest times in French history. During this period a great deal of Huguenots fled to other Protestant lands in Europe and around the world. New France, then, had a more than half-century start on the intolerance of Protestantism.

Such clearly Catholic religious interest was seen also in the foundation of Ville-Marie, now called Montreal. Paul Chomedey de Maisonneuve was called in 1541 by the Jesuits to found a colony on the island. From the beginning the colony had a particularly Catholic presence. The Jesuit, Jérôme Le Royer, had begun the “Notre-Dame Society of Montreal.” Its true purpose is seen in its full official title: “The Notre-Dame Society of Montreal for the conversion of the savages in New France.” The Jesuits and, even more, Sulpician interest in the Native population of Hochelaga (a village located on what is now the campus of McGill University) was obvious.

From 1627 until the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century there was an almost negligible presence of Protestants among the French population. Those who were professing Protestants at the time had several choices. Either they could flee to New England, abjure their faith, or live as ‘Nicodemites’ (a word from Calvin referring to those who believed as Protestants and lived as Catholics—like Nicodemus who lived as a Pharisee by day and came to Jesus by night). Whatever the choice, New France was officially closed to Protestants.<sup>4</sup>

This policy was historically very effective. Even counting the intrepid Protestant missionaries of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries and the extraordinary conversion of the temperance priest Chiniqy, to which we shall return, the Protestant presence remained very weak in the French population. Even today, when using the most generous definition of ‘Protestantism’ possible, Protestants are in the single digits.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Carole Blackburn, *Harvest of Souls: The Jesuit Missions and Colonialism in North America 1632-1650* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2000), pp. 25-26.

<sup>4</sup> See Bédard 43 and Larin 19.

<sup>5</sup> Frédéric Castel, “Progrès du catholicisme, influence de l’immigration: Les grandes tendances de l’affiliation religieuse depuis la Seconde Guerre Mondiale,” in *l’Annuaire du Québec 2004*, ed. Michel Venne (Montréal: Fides, 2003), 275.

Conversely, throughout this time, most particularly in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, the Catholic Church had an incredibly powerful presence. In the late 19<sup>th</sup> century French-Quebec was one of the most fiercely Catholic societies in the World. Such strength was no-doubt due to two important events: the conquest of Quebec by the British in 1759 and the failed patriot rebellion in 1837. Obviously, the conquest was a huge blow to the French-speaking population and despite the calls by the Church for order some did not accept the prospects of the English yoke. In 1837 certain French-patriots rose up, but were defeated by the English lords.

Although a defeat for French political nationalism, the aftermath of the uprising was a real opportunity for the Catholic Church. Nationalism was still very strong, but it was evidenced for the next century in the Catholic Church. In the latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century Quebec harboured a very strong brand of Ultramontane Catholicism. In France two forms of Catholicism had battled for power over the centuries—a Gallican Catholicism (under the influence of the Crown or government) and an Ultramontane Catholicism (under the influence of Rome which was, geographically speaking, ‘ultra’ or over the mountains from France). The center of the Quebecois culture, then, was the Church and not the State. Typical of Ultramontane Catholicism is the desire to be involved in many of the most important social structures of a society—schools, hospitals, orphanages, etc. In French-Quebec the Church became virtually ubiquitous—their influence was clearly seen in all areas of public life.

The major figure in the process of absorbing the civil sphere into the ecclesiastical was the bishop of Montreal for much of the century, Ignace Bourget. Born in 1799, he was leader of the Catholic Church in Quebec through much of the period after the failed rebellion until 1885. He was one of the most consistent prophets of Ultramontaine structure and piety and was, very naturally, critical of any Protestant presence among the French-speaking population. His was the old opinion that one cannot be a faithful member of the French nation if one is not Catholic. Such was an evident argument especially since many of the French Protestant mission organizations were overtly linked with English Protestant denominations.

## *2. French, not English*

A second factor which contributes to the marginalization of the Reformed Quebecois is the overwhelming presence of the English in North America. Despite the official English control of Quebec following the conquest of 1759, the French in Quebec did not assimilate into English Canada as had the other French colonies assimilated into America.

Evidently, however, it was difficult for the French-speaking Reformed faithful to trace their history through their ancestors back to the beginnings of the Protestant Reformation. Hence, missionaries usually talked of ‘spiritual’ ancestry all the while practically being inheritors of a form of Protestantism from some other country, continent or culture.

Following the English Conquest of 1759 the Anglican Church (the Church of England or the Episcopalian Church as it is known south of the border) cautiously attempted establishing French parishes throughout Quebec. It was thought that the promotion of the English Church would in turn promote faithfulness to the English crown. Such might have been true, but the plan backfired in that many Catholics, most predominately the hierarchy, saw clearly through this ploy and vigorously warned their faithful about the schemes of the English. Nonetheless, several important parishes were established which had some limited effect.

Some English denominations learned from these experiences and in the 19<sup>th</sup> century started to solicit French-speaking missionaries from the traditionally Protestant areas of

Switzerland. Such was meant to overcome the traditional language barrier, but more particularly the political and social barrier brought with the English. These missionaries finally started to have some impact, after much trial, on the French-speaking population in Quebec. It was because of these missionaries that small Protestant communities were established.

Nineteenth-century Christianity in Europe showed a great deal of missionary zeal. In the first instance were the projects of the Missionary Society of Lausanne which brought Swiss evangelists of the same persuasion to Quebec in 1834. After a fair amount of difficulty these missionaries under the guidance of Henriette Feller enjoyed some success. Feller's mission post, Grande-Ligne (south of Montreal) was far enough away from any major Catholic centre to be left alone. Hence, it was possible slowly to build the trust of certain French-Canadians and witness certain conversions. She encouraged a clear decision and conversion to Christianity and a resulting baptism. Such Baptist tendencies had a major influence on further missionary activity.

Following the revolt of 1837 and the subsequent rise of Ultramontaine Catholicism, however, Protestant missionary activity became more difficult. The Catholic Church viewed Protestant missionary activity with much suspicion. It was not simply for theological reasons, but equally for social and cultural reasons. Protestantism represented a very different way of living. The Italian-type piety urged by the Catholic Church was very far from the rather simple, Bible-based piety of the Protestant. Protestant piety was most clearly inculcated in the distribution of Bibles and the foundation of French-Protestant schools. Reading Scripture was seen, rightly, as the basis of Protestantism.

At the same time as the Missionary Society of Lausanne, came the activity of *The French Canadian Missionary Society*. Decidedly more Reformed in its constitution, it, very significantly, represented a renewed *English* missionary vision for French-speaking Quebec. *The French Canadian Missionary Society* soon came into conflict with the work of Feller and those at Grande Ligne. Money that normally went to Feller was now redirected to the work of other missionaries who had paedobaptist sympathies. Further, new missionaries were recruited from the same evangelical Calvinist circles in France. Yet, both societies tried at first to work in different areas of Quebec. Feller was South of the St. Lawrence River and *The French Canadian Missionary Society* North of the St. Lawrence River.

The situation became even worse when the individual denominations which had formerly promoted *The French Canadian Missionary Society* decided to send their own missionaries. By mid-century one could count five missionary societies at work among French-Speaking Quebecers – that of Grande Ligne (soon affiliated with the American Baptist Home Mission Society), *The French Canadian Missionary Society*, a Presbyterian mission society, an Anglican mission society, and a Methodist mission society. Common to all of these works was their *English* language and heritage. Indeed, although certain missionaries were from French-speaking Europe or even Quebec, they had a great dependence on English-speaking churches for support (a situation that continues to characterise French-Canadian mission work).

Most well known is the support of the Presbyterians for a converted priest named Charles Chiniquy—with whose book *Fifty Years in the Church of Rome* you might be familiar. Chiniquy was a fairly important priest preaching temperance to the people of Quebec. The bishop of Quebec called him the 'Apostle of Temperance,' and, most memorably, the Pope sent him a special cross for his work. Unfortunately, his stellar reputation would not last for he was accused of sexual impropriety and was put away privily by sending him to a French-speaking emigrant parish in Southern Illinois. Soon, however, he ran into problems with his own parish members

and the local Catholic hierarchy. Following a fire in his parish he was charged by one of his parishoners with wrong-doing. He won the ensuing court case being represented by none other than the future president Abraham Lincoln. As an aside, Chiniquy writes his friendship with Lincoln continued and had clear evidence that the Jesuits were behind Lincoln's assassination. Whether or not this is true, I cannot tell, but that it well represents Chiniquy's larger-than-life persona is plainly clear. More importantly was his conflict with the local Irish Catholic hierarchy. In 1856 he was suspended from his office for insubmission and spent several years fighting for reconciliation before his final excommunication in 1858.

At this same time he had a clear conversion to Protestantism. In his mind the Presbyterian Church represented the most historic form of French Protestantism, so he joined with the American and subsequently Canadian Presbyterians for most of the rest of his life. Although he worked principally with a French-speaking presbytery in Illinois, he came frequently to Québec, amid *much* controversy, to speak about the dangers of Romanism and the wonders of Protestantism. Many of his speeches represent the content of his *50 Years in the Church of Rome*. Chiniquy was a gifted orator and, hence, enormously controversial. He was never one to shy from controversy or the spotlight. He was lionized by the Protestants (by certain to this day) and villanized by the Catholics. I point out yet again that much of his work was done at the behest of the *English* Presbyterian and Protestant churches.

Certainly support for the work from English-speaking Churches was welcome and necessary (it still is!), but the French-speaking Churches have had the unfortunate of being involved in certain theological disputes and directives which quite surely were not their own. Certain in both the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries we have in Quebec a case of 'he who pays the piper, picks the tune.' At the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century the growing work outstretched the available funds. By mid-century European monies had all but dried up. The available sources were from the rest of Canada and the United States. The funds necessary were not always forthcoming.

Further, those paying for the mission work in Quebec did not always have an understanding of the language, culture, or history on which to base their missiological strategy. Even today, if I may speak about the Eglise Réformée du Québec, most Quebecois members of our Churches do not realize the historical differences and tension between the various Reformed and Presbyterian denominations present in North America.

The problem was (even until recently) that it was not only in this one evangelistic domain that the French were reliant on the English. At the end of the century and well into the 20<sup>th</sup> century the Quebecois were also largely reliant on major English business. An animosity was created that still lingers in Quebec society. The heads of these major corporations did not always treat their French-Canadian workers with the greatest respect or fairness. The business practices of the English then did not attract the French to the Churches of the English. Such was a point forcefully made by the Catholic hierarchy.

The major gains of French-Protestant Churches in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century slowed to a trickle and largely disappeared in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. A new generation of leaders in the major Canadian denominations did not consider the aggressive evangelisation of the French Catholics to be a major priority—"they are Christians too are they not?" they asked themselves. Indeed, it was at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century that the Methodists, Congregationalists and a part of the Presbyterian Church came together to form the United Church of Canada. Although the Presbyterians had been the strongest supporters of the French-Canadian mission work, the remaining French parishes all went into the newly-formed United Church. Following the union

the French-Canadian missionary work was largely ignored or forgotten in United Church ranks. The remaining Presbyterians restarted some work, but it was much more modest than before.

The reliance on English-Churches and institutions was most clearly felt in the domain of pastoral formation. Until 1927 there were institutions with programs to form French-speaking pastors. After this time and until the third quarter of the century, no such institutions existed in Quebec. French-speaking Protestant pastors would either have to go to Europe or a North American school in English.

### *3. Reformed, not Baptist*

Despite the strong presence of paedo-Baptist, particularly Presbyterian missionaries in 19<sup>th</sup> century, it was to the Evangelicals and particularly the Pentecostals who had the greatest gains in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. As such the Reformed believer today faces the curious situation of being the strange advocate of paedobaptism in an overwhelmingly adult baptismal milieu. Many have been the times when the pastor or member of a Reformed Church was reproached for being less-than-biblical on this doctrine—certainly paedobaptism is seen as a left-over from the automatic grace and works-righteousness of Catholicism. The Reformed ‘make up’ for this deficiency on their helpful insistence on the sovereignty of God, but barely.

Certain Baptist and Pentecostal groups existed already in French-Quebec before the Second World War, but it was truly after that they reorganized their effectives and regained a deal of missionary zeal. Both the Union and Fellowship Baptists gained momentum in this era. Most helpful was the weakening of the Catholic Church and the opening of Quebec Society to all sorts of new ideas.

This process happened in what is generally called the “Quiet Revolution.” It was ‘Quiet’ in that no open or armed conflicts occurred, yet it was still a “Revolution” in that the entire value-system of the Quebecois people was questioned and, often, rejected. Upon rejecting the traditional deeply-Catholic societal values, the Quebecois needed to turn to some other system of values. In this open search for a new foundation most Evangelical churches found a great many new converts. For example, even the church which I serve is mostly attended by young converts from the 1970s and early 80s.

Unfortunately, however, it was not only moderate Evangelical or even Pentecostal churches which gained membership, but all sorts of sects, cults and new-age movements. People were simply interested in what was on the outside. Groups like the Raeliens, were formed and propagated in this period, and sadly still today. The Raeliens, led by their prophet Rael, believe that the world was formed by aliens and will soon be revisited by them to form an alien utopia. The aliens simply placed our minds in our bodies and will teach us how to replace our bodies so our minds can live forever. Members of this group want to get a head-start on the replacement of our bodies so set up a company called Clonaid several years ago to clone human beings. Perhaps you remember that this group made the news a few years back around the world claiming to have cloned the first human being. The point of explaining this group is not in its actual belief-system, but in the fact that a great number of the important members of this bizarre cult grew up in French-Catholic homes. Such shows the extreme interest in anything ‘other’ in the 1970s and beyond.

A very notable Evangelical opportunity came at the Universal Exposition, or EXPO held in Montréal in 1967. EXPO 67 was a high-water point for Montreal. It was without a doubt a significant cultural achievement for the city and for Canada. Among the less important, but

more telling impacts was on clothing. On opening day, there was considerable comment on the uniform of the hostesses from the UK Pavilion. The dresses had been designed to the then new minidress style, which had been introduced in the previous year by a British fashion designer. By the middle of the summer, nearly every other pavilion had raised the hem of the uniforms of their hostesses. Canadian women were quick to take to the liberated style of the ‘mini skirt.’

During the Expo, many churches worked together to make a Christian Pavilion called “Sermons from Science.” The main goal was to use observations based on science (in the form of videos from the Moody Institute of Science) to teach the existence of a Creator—in a certain sense a pavilion dedicated to the ‘intelligent design.’ The considerable success of this presentation led to important exposure of the Evangelical and Protestant movement among the Quebecois people. Many found the Evangelical message and moral much more interesting than that to which they had been exposed in the Catholic Church. It was interesting for its fervent piety, warmth and down-to-earth nature.

In the years following 1967 we see the main lines of what we recognize as Quebecois Protestantism today. From about 57 Protestant communities in 1950, the various Protestant bodies counted 341 in 1986—an obvious considerable flourishing in numbers. Growth slowed considerably in the 1980s and is now about 500 churches and a little less than 100,000 adherents. Church growth is relatively slow among most churches except when members are ‘stolen’ from other congregations to more vibrant, thriving groups or among French-speaking, non-Quebecois immigrants.

In these years, the *Eglise Réformée du Québec* was founded. At first simply a loose-group of more ‘Evangelical’ Presbyterian and Reformed pastors, it came together on the impetus of the *Alliance Réformée Évangélique* (the Reformed Evangelical Alliance). Although not frequently used by Reformed Churches outside of Quebec, the moniker ‘Evangelical’ is used generally by the *Eglise Réformée* to distance ourselves from liberal Protestantism. Most importantly is its implicit encouragement of *evangelism*.

In the late 1970s various missionary-pastors (representing Canadian Presbyterian Churches, the Presbyterian Church in America, and the Christian Reformed Church) and elders from French-speaking Reformed congregations gathered together to form the Alliance with goals of forming an independent Reformed theological school, (the *Institut Farel*, now Farel Reformed Theological Seminary), a theological magazine (Word Magazine—which existed throughout the 80s), a publishing house (Word Publishers—again existing throughout the 80s), and a united denomination. The fruit of this last desire was finally realized in 1988 with the formation of the *Eglise Réformée du Québec*. Various parishes were opened and closed or moved, but today we are at a stable six parishes throughout the province. The parishes are all quite small, but with a stable core of committed members.

#### 4. *Biblical Moral Standard, not Post-Modern*

A final factor which puts the Reformed Christian in an overwhelmingly minority position is that of following a biblical moral standard and not that of general French-speaking society. Before the Quiet Revolution the Catholic Church in Quebec was very conservative on the hot-button moral issues. Certainly practicing homosexuality, abortion, euthanasia, etc. were clearly condemned by the Catholic Church. The problem before the Revolution was, ironically, not being conservative, but, in the eyes of many, being *too* conservative. The Catholic Church was

seen by many to be stuck in a bygone era where nothing could change and anything new was condemned with a kind of swift knee-jerk reaction.

The Quiet Revolution of the 1960s, then, brought about a rapid secularization of Quebecois society. During this time Quebec was largely transformed into a welfare state. The provincial government was given a great deal of control over the society in general—control that had once been given to the Church. Hence, the government was also pulled along with the will of the people. It is in this vein that after the Quiet Revolution, Quebecois society set itself in the *avante-garde* of acceptance of most family values the Reformed Christian would hold dear. The Quebec government beat the Canadian government to the acceptance of homosexual marriage. The large homosexual community in Montreal has considerable economic and political power. Further, the abortion rate per capita in Quebec is higher than any other province or state in North America.<sup>6</sup> Similarly, the divorce rate in Quebec higher than that of the other provinces in Canada. Most obviously, this in popular culture—especially television, one can see a steady assault on traditional biblical, family values.

Added into the mix is the rise of the state's power in the last two generations. With the decline of the Catholic Church's influence on and control of public life in the 1960s the state became the centre of Quebecois society. So much so that it became imperative for many to have an independent state for an independent Quebecois nation. It was at this time that the national identity among Francophone Quebecers was largely transformed—no longer was one a *Canadien français*, but now a *Québécois*. This strong nationalistic desire is no doubt one of the stories you have followed in the news outside of Quebec. On two occasions, one in 1980 and one in 1995 a referendum was held and lost by the proponents of the formation of an independent state of Quebec. In any case, the Canada's Federal government and Quebec's provincial government continue to work on this lingering problem.

All this leads the French-Reformed Christian to hang in precarious balance in his participation in the things of the state. The political situation is quite different than what some of you south of the border might experience. Instead of a great two-party divide (which we saw in action last week), Canada, and especially Quebec, has four or five main options (not counting the several other smaller parties). It makes for a much more delicate relationship and demands a lot of wisdom. For example, most generally 'evangelical' Churches no doubt have members who vote for any one of the various political parties.

Commitment to a biblical standard of morality is not easy. Quebec can be seen as the post-modern society par-excellence. A confluence of divergent opinions and a real critique of any meta-narrative make Quebec a central hub of pluralistic thinking. As such the meta-narrative of the cross makes little sense to many people—to some it is clearly an offence.

## **5. Conclusion – the *raison d'être* of the Réformée Québécois**

Obviously some people think the adventure of being Reformed is worth the challenges of four overwhelming reasons to the contrary. So, we might ask, why in the world would want to join a group facing overwhelming obstacles? Perhaps it is because without an established Church one can dream bigger here. Perhaps it is a passion for working with the lost and lonely. Perhaps it is the passion for teaching God's Word. Most certainly it is because the Spirit is at work here as well. It is in the matrix of marginalization that the ERQ has its dynamism.

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<sup>6</sup> According to Statistics Canada there were 41.7 abortions per 100 live births (30, 703 in total) in Quebec in 2003. <http://www40.statcan.ca/101/cst01/health42a.htm>.

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