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THE CATHOLIC CLERGY AND THE FUR TRADE 1585-1685 *

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As the title of this paper suggests, our chief concern is with the clergy in the fur trade. Of necessity certain aspects of the clergy's involvement with the fur trade will not be discussed. The interminable wrangling over the brandy traffic, the consequent questions of reservation of the sacraments and excommunication for trafficking, the misunderstanding about *congés*, the bitter confrontations regarding personal interests of civil officials in the fur trade will not concern us here. Laval's opposition to the arrangements for the handling of the *coureurs-de-bois* and the trade in the *pays d'en haut*, the relationship between military and commercial enterprise, the quarrels between Governor and Intendant, and the activities of Le Ber, La Salle, Dulhut and La Taupine on Frontenac's behalf are related to our topic but do not enter specifically into the problem of the clergy's involvement in the fur trade. Furthermore, it is necessary to recall that the Catholic clergy which concerns us in this paper was by and large a missionary not a parochial clergy. Also, it is well to recall that Rouen's claims to spiritual jurisdiction in Canada if not consequent upon were at least parallel to the exercise of Rouen's secular jurisdiction in commercial exploitation and civil administration in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. This last observation takes us to metropolitan France in our attempt to define the conceptual and legal frameworks of our topic.

The most notable observation that may be made concerning the commercial entrepreneurs of the French Atlantic littoral is that they subscribed, whether Catholics or Huguenots, to the same work ethic. The same association between their Providential protection and their capitalistic enterprise may be traced among the Catholics, Calvinists and Lutherans of the Atlantic ports, thereby modifying the Weber thesis to the extent of identifying an entrepreneurial ethic rather than a religious ethic. Status differences among religious groups flowed from differences among them on non-religious grounds. The economic inequities between Catholics and Huguenots, if real, flowed primarily from the fact that within the Catholic group were

* The author is grateful to the Canada Council for assistance received in the past for research in the general field of church-state relations. This paper deals with one of the aspects of this subject.

heavily represented the most disadvantaged sectors of the society, and not from the fact that its members were "Papists". Indeed, the denunciations of usury, speculation and rugged individualism were never more eloquent or uncompromising than when they flowed from the lips of Reformers such as Jean Calvin or Menno Simon. If Protestantism, as a religion of the Book, was diffused especially along the Atlantic coast of France it was because of the literacy and the accessibility of the commercial bourgeoisie to the new doctrine, also because of the cosmopolitanism of the ports. As the concept of the elect and predestined facilitated among Huguenots the development of "godly enterprise" so the concepts of grace and saintly patronage sustained among Catholics a sense of "Providential mission". Without denying that there developed a remarkable identification of Protestantism and capitalism, although not necessarily in any cause-effect relationship, the historian is compelled to recognize a similar, if not a precisely identical, relationship between Catholicism and capitalism.

One of the most succinct expressions of Catholic capitalistic motivation is found in *Le Commerce Honorable* (Nantes, 1646), an evaluation of sixteenth and early seventeenth century French activities in the Americas together with practical plans for the development of French commercial supremacy. It was written by Jean Eon, a Carmelite and protégé of Marshal de la Meilleraye, Governor of Brittany and a cousin of Cardinal Richelieu. The churchman styled himself simply "un habitant de la ville de Nantes", nevertheless his knowledge of commercial affairs reflected well the enterprise and activity of the cosmopolitan port section of that city. Among statements and arguments typical of what has been termed erroneously "the Protestant ethic" the following is noteworthy :

Or si selon les maximes de la Philosophie les estres doivent estre conservez & entretenuz par les mêmes principes qui leur ont donné la première formation; il est aisé à conclure, qu'un des plus propres moiens pour conserver & avncer la foi de l'Eglise, c'est la navigation & le Commerce de mer. Et certes la divine providence montre autant en ceci sa sagesse, que sa bonté. Car comme le Commerce spirituel, & le temporel ont beaucoup de rapport en leurs pratiques; elle a voulu joindre les industries de l'un & de l'autre ensemble, faisant que les navigations, & les courses que les marchans font en divers pais, pour y porter & en rapporter les richesses, sont les moiens dont les personnes religieuses & les hommes apostoliques se servent pour acquérir des ames à Dieu, & amplifier le Roiaume de Iesus-Christ.¹

Eon cited Canada as an example of trade being an ally and mainstay of evangelization. Indeed, the enterprise of the Messieurs et Dames de Montréal is a good example of the alliance between Catholic

¹ Jean Eon, *Le Commerce Honorable* (Nantes, 1646), p. 140.

eschatological undercurrents and foreign missionary work on the one hand and agricultural settlement and commercial exploitation on the other hand. The island of Montreal had been selected by religious zealots for such diverse, yet consonant objectives, as evangelization of the Amerindians, development of the agricultural potential of the island, control of the fur trade and supply trade of the upper country, and military command of the Ottawa-St. Lawrence-Richelieu basin.

What was the official position of the clergy with regard to commercial activity? Generally, it seems correct to say that it was irregular for the clergy to engage in commercial ventures such as the fur trade. "Le négoce est défendu aux Clercs & aux Religieux à cause de l'avidité du gain, qui est le motif de ceux qui embrassent cette profession", wrote Héricourt in *Les Lois Ecclésiastiques*, citing a decree of Pope Alexander III (1159-1181). This interdiction was based on the principle that *nemo militans Deo immiscet se negotiis saecularibus* and on numerous conciliar declarations.² Pope Urban VIII issued a formal prohibition to the clergy regarding commerce on February 22, 1633, and this interdiction was repeated by Pope Clement IX on June 7, 1669, following intelligence of the fact that Jesuit missionaries in Japan having become indebted about 20,000 *livres* had resorted to extensive trading for the support of their missions.³ In addition both the clergy and the nobility as privileged orders were regarded as being above the pursuit of such objectives for to have become involved in commerce would have constituted a derogation of their class status. The Compagnie des Indes Occidentales permitted the nobility to engage in commerce and in 1669, Louis XIV "... désirant ne rien omettre de ce qui peut davantage exciter nos Sujets à s'engager dans ce Commerce..." proclaimed that it was henceforth possible to engage in commerce without derogating one's nobility, a policy which was confirmed in 1685 specifically for *gentilshommes* trading in Canada.⁴ Naturally enough, the edict made no mention of the clergy.

Indeed, Colbert received confirmation of a papal bull which prohibited the clergy from engaging in commerce. Colbert wrote to his informant in Rome :

² J. P. Migne, *Première Encyclopédie Théologique* (Paris, 1862), Vol. X, pp. 573-4; Louis de Héricourt, *Les Loix Ecclésiastiques de France* (Paris, 1730), p. 191.

³ A. Launay, ed., *Lettres de Monseigneur Pallu* (Angoulême, 1904-05), Vol. II, Pallu to Bagot, December 26, 1663, p. 23.

⁴ M. L. Moreau de St. Méry, *Les Loix et Constitutions des Colonies Françaises de l'Amérique sous le Vent* (Paris, 1784), Vol. I, pp. 182-3; Isambert et al., *Recueil général des Anciennes Loix françaises* (Paris, 1822-33), Vol. XVIII, pp. 217-18; A. C., *Series F3*, Vol. VI, arrêt of March 10, 1685, fol. 214, 215; A. C., *Series C11G*, Vol. II, Registration of August 30, 1685, fol. 256.

Vous m'avez fait plaisir de m'envoyer la bulle portant deffenses a tous religieux de faire aucun commerce. La souveraineté que les jesuistes possèdent dans le Paraguay en l'Amérique meridionale n'est pas comprises dans cette deffence d'autant que le commerce consiste a acheter et vendre. Et ils ne font que vendre en ce pays la tout ce qui vient de leurs possessions qui sont très grandes.⁵

The papal prohibition apparently applied to Canada, where, according to Talon, there was much talk of the self-interest of the Jesuits in their Indian missions because of "la traite des pelleteries qu'on assure qu'ils font aux Outaouaks et au Cap de la Madeleine; ce que je ne sais pas de science certaine".⁶ A priest at the Séminaire des Missions Étrangères on the rue du Bac in Paris suggested that the papal interdiction would change little in practice because some clergy would continue to engage in commerce:

Nous avons fait par le passé ce que nous avons pu pour supprimer cet abus . . . Ainsi, si la dite Constitution qui porte interdiction du commerce vous vient entre les mains vous ne la notifierez point aux religieux, vous ne leur en parlerez pas mesme et vous n'en presserez point l'exécution. Je suis convaincu que tout ce que vous pourriez faire ne profiteroit à rien, et ne se serviroit qu'à aigrir des esprits, et à réveiller le souvenir de plusieurs choses qui les aliéneroient de vous et vous les rendroient entièrement contraires.⁷

The official non-involvement of the clergy in trade and commerce can be argued from the royal ordinance of 1673 dealing with letters of exchange which considered them profane undertakings, therefore prohibited to those in holy orders. However, letters of exchange called *rescripts*, endorsed by bishops and other clergy for their intendants, farmers or receivers, were accepted.⁸ Also, it may be hypothesized that what was forbidden probably existed and that this existence was the cause of the restraining order. It is known, for example, that the Ursulines made out letters of exchange under the signature of the Mother Superior, that the Jesuits regularly received letters of exchange, as did the Sulpician secular clergy at Montreal. Because they were considered to be contracts of sale and not loans, letters of exchange did not fall into the condemnation of usury. French merchants continued to distinguish between interest and *change* — the latter being charges levied for exchanging currencies or bills of exchange — nevertheless, outright interest on

⁵ P.A.C., 500 de Colbert, Vol. CCIV, Colbert to abbé Bourlémont, November 1, 1669, fol. 286.

⁶ *Collection de Mémoires et de Relations sur l'Histoire ancienne du Canada* (Québec, 1840), p. 3.

⁷ Launay, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, Pallu to Deydier, December 8, 1670, p. 120.

⁸ Henri Levy-Bruhl, *Histoire de la Lettre de Change en France aux XVII^e et XVIII^e siècles* (Paris, 1933), pp. 45-7; for evidence of employment of letters of exchange by the religious communities in Canada, see A.S.Q., *Fonds Verreau XIII*, No. 29 and B.S.S.P., *Tronson Correspondence*, Vol. I, Nos. 120, 121, 130.

borrowed money, for example, was still considered to be usury under the terms of the royal declaration dated December 1665.⁹ These views formed part of the background of European exploitation of North America.

It was only after 1600 that beaver pelts came to be valued more than other peltry bartered from the Amerindians of the Atlantic coasts by European fishermen. North American beaver was not used in Western Europe at first but was transhipped from Moscow to unidentified Oriental markets. Following the extinction of the European beaver, demand for North American pelts increased to the extent that in France the domestic sources, the hare and the rabbit, were virtually driven from the market. Moreover, the Swedish cavalier hat, which became popular during the Thirty Years' War, the broad brim of which was based upon the shapeholding qualities and resilience peculiar to beaver felt, resulted in Swedish felting techniques being introduced into France. This in turn stimulated the Canadian trade.¹⁰ H. A. Innis has indicated how the communal habits of the beaver invited annihilation of entire colonies, and G. T. Hunt, M. Lawson, W. J. Eccles, H. Poland and W. Jacobs have indicated the problem of international rivalry on the high seas and in the interior of North America among the suppliers. When monographs on Dutch commerce of the same period are consulted, the dangers and costs of transatlantic trade, the high insurance and freight rates, the intricate pattern of ship ownership and outfitting, and the fluctuations of the market loom large in the appreciation of the economic ventures of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries.¹¹ The fluctuation in the price of pelts, notably on the Rouen market which was the Western counterpart of Leipzig or Archangel, drove French hatters to use other furs with beaver in felting, a practice known as *secrétage* or carroting. Even more consequential was the eventual over-supply of Canadian beaver, the glut on the French market and the necessity for non-monopolistic outlets, preferably from the Canadian Colony itself to the Dutch and English (through "mission Indian" intermediaries and runners) so that the excess beaver could eventually find its way to outlets such as Hamburg or Amsterdam.

⁹ D. Jousse, *Nouveau Commentaire sur les Ordonnances* (Paris, 1755), pp. 138-40.

¹⁰ J. F. Crean, "Hats and the Fur Trade", *Canadian Journal of Economics and Political Science*, Vol. XXVIII, No. 3 (August, 1962), pp. 378-9. Useful information is also found in Raymond H. Fisher, *The Russian Fur Trade, 1550-1700* (Berkeley, 1943).

¹¹ Simon Hart, "The Dutch and North America in the First Half of the Seventeenth Century", *Mededelingen van de Nederlandse Vereniging Voor Zeegeschiedenis*, No. 20 (maart, 1970), pp. 5-17.

The earliest fur trade was carried on by unrecorded fishermen and travellers who protected their investment and interests by the "conspiracy of silence".¹² By 1608 more than eighty vessels were reported off the coasts of Canada principally, if not solely, engaged in this traffic.¹³ The Jesuits were closely associated with Mme de Guercheville, Biencourt and René le Coq in Acadia but Champlain (who himself was hardly a disinterested person) denied charges they were active partners in this commerce:

C'est ce contrat d'association qui a fait tant semer de bruits de plaintes, & de crieries contre les Peres Iesuites qui en cela, & en toute autre chose se sont equitalement gouvernez selon Dieu & raison, à la honte et confusion de leurs envieux et medisans.¹⁴

Biencourt and Robin had entered into a partnership with the Huguenot merchants DuJardin and Duchesne, but when the latter refused to bring the Jesuit missionaries to Acadia Mme de Guercheville bought out the Huguenots' interests for 3,800 *livres* and had the Jesuits associated with Biencourt and Robin for the following terms:

Au moyen de quoy, ils ont accordé et consenty que lesdicts Pères Biard et Macé, tant en leur nom qu'en la qualité susdicte, jouissent et ayent à leur profit la totale moitié de toutes et chacunes les marchandises, profits et autres choses et circonstances et dépendances qui pourront provenir de la traicte qui se fera audict lieu de la Nouvelle-France.¹⁵

This was the source of many of the misunderstandings, fears and rivalries evident in subsequent decades in the New World. The most memorable accusation was that they came "to convert beavers rather than savages", a charge levied by the Huguenot pilot Jacques Michel in 1629. Thereafter several French Governors and Intendants maintained that the Jesuits had given proof from the very moment they set foot in New France of an intolerant and inopportune zeal, a predisposition to meddle in secular matters and engage in commerce, and a desire to dominate colonization.¹⁶

¹² John Witthoft, "Archaeology as a Key to the Colonial Fur Trade", *Aspects of the Fur Trade. Selected Papers of the 1965 North American Fur Trade Conference* (St. Paul, 1966), pp. 55-61.

¹³ E. Réveillaud, *Histoire Chronologique de la Nouvelle-France ou Canada par le Père Sixte le Tac, Récollet* (Paris, 1888), p. 72.

¹⁴ C. H. de Laverdière, ed., *Œuvres de Champlain* (Québec, 1970), Vol. II, p. 768.

¹⁵ *Contrat d'association des Jésuites au trafic de Canada* (n.p., 1613), article 3, p. 5.

¹⁶ Adrien Huguet, *Jean de Poutrincourt, fondateur de Port Royal en Acadie, vice-roi du Canada, 1557-1615* (Paris, 1932), pp. 350-51; G. Marcel, ed. *Factum du Procès entre Jean de Biencourt, Sr. de Poutrincourt et les Pères Biard et Massé, Jésuites* (Paris, 1887), p. vii asserts that the Jesuits traded Honduras woods, vermillion and French wines for wolf, deer and beaver skins, and that this trade was negotiated on occasion from armed vessels. Such a trade would have anticipated Colbert's and Talon's triangular trade; Mellino di Cestro, *Essai sur le Commerce des Jésuites* (Perpignan, 1762), pp. 7-8.

The clergy never denied that they handled furs. They accepted furs, particularly beaver pelts, as mass fees, offerings and tithes from the Indians among whom they laboured, and later furs were demanded by way of reparations and penance from converts.¹⁷ Jouvency wrote in 1610 that beaver was the basis of almost the entire system of commerce: "Commercii Canadensis ratio fere tota constat." The "monnoye du Pais", as it was called, was probably accepted at confession as early as 1632. De Quen accepted furs in penance in 1643-44, just as the civil officers exacted payment in beaver skins the following year. In 1636 Father Le Jeune admitted that his colleagues employed furs as a common currency — "we do not scruple to use it in the way of a purchase" — but insisted that they refrained from employing it to make huge profits and added that "if it is dispassionately believed that there is some kind of traffic, or even if Your Reverence deems it best to drop all this, in order to not offend any one, we are ready to give it up entirely".¹⁸ He felt it incumbent upon him to clarify the matter for his superiors:

Now, in regard to this Trading: Your Reverence wrote me and called my attention to the rule of the seventh general Congregation of our Society, which absolutely forbids all kinds of commerce and business, under any pretext whatever. Some others of our Fathers send me word that we must not even look at from the corner of our eyes, or touch with the ends of our fingers the skin of any of these animals, which are of great value here; what can be the cause of this advice? ¹⁹

He answered his rhetorical question with the observation that this complete prohibition did not indicate distrust on the part of his superiors. Rather the accusations brought by "unnamed persons in France", who cried out Jesuit "hands are not clean from this traffic", were to blame.

Charges against the Jesuits were sufficiently frequent and vehement by 1643 to force the directors and associates of the Company of New France to make a formal declaration denying any Jesuit interest in the commercial company:

The Directors and Associates in the Company of New France called Canada, having learned that some persons persuade themselves, and circulate the report, that the Society of the Jesuit Fathers has part in the shipments, returns, and Commercial Transactions which are made in the said country . . . [declare] that the said Jesuit Fathers are

¹⁷ H. Lallemand, *Lettres envoyées de la Nouvelle France* (Paris, 1660), October 10, 1659, pp. 25-6, 29-30; Dom Claude Martin, *Marie de l'Incarnation: Ecrits Spirituels et Historiques* (Paris, 1935), Vol. III, pp. 377-78; R. G. Thwaites, ed., *The Jesuit Relations and Allied Documents* (Cleveland, 1896-1901), Vol. XXV, p. 269; Vol. XXVI, p. 83; Vol. XXIX, p. 195; Vol. XXXVI, p. 250; Vol. XLII, pp. 273, 275, 299; Vol. XLIII, p. 171; Vol. LXIX, pp. 249, 257, 263.

¹⁸ The author is grateful to Fr. Adrien Pouliot, S.J., for clarification of several incidents considered in this paper. Thwaites, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, p. 248; Vol. IX, pp. 171-183; Vol. XXV, p. 187; Vol. XXVIII, p. 225.

¹⁹ Thwaites, *op. cit.*, Vol. IX, pp. 171-173.

not associated in the said Company of New France, directly or indirectly, and have no part in the traffic of merchandise which is carried on by it.²⁰

The declaration that there was no "indirect" interest may have referred to the possibility that the Jesuits participated in the profits by virtue of article 22 of the charter of 1627 which provided that each of the associates could "associate another who seems proper to him, who nevertheless will not have a vote and may not ask anything of the said Society". When the fur trade monopoly of the Company of New France was transferred to the Community of Habitants in 1645, due in good measure to the efforts of Pierre Le Gardeur de Repentigny and Noël Juchereau des Châtelets, the Jesuits were assured that their activities would not be hampered, although those of individual traders would be restricted, so long as they took care to conduct their activities secretly.²¹

Although relations between the Community of Habitants and the missionaries were excellent and the church enjoyed privileges, it soon became evident that the assumption of political office, as in the case of Father Paul Ragueneau who was "put at the head of a general council" in order to deliberate "public affairs every day",²² did not necessarily accord political power. Indeed, complaints of mismanagement and fraud on the part of the colonial traders with whom the Jesuits were closely associated aroused Father Poncet in France to reproach Ragueneau for "meddling too much in government affairs about which he has no idea at all".²³ There is little doubt that public affairs at the time were largely commercial affairs. When a rumour began to circulate that all trade between the French and Indians at Quebec would be prohibited as it had been at Trois-Rivières, Father Vimont (who had obtained the support of the Company of New France in 1643) made inquiries of the general manager of the Community of Habitants and obtained assurances that the Jesuits could continue their trade so long as they did so quietly without arousing antagonism:

Le 15. de Nov. le bruit estant qu'on s'en alloit icy publier la defense qui auoit esté publiée aux Trois Riuieres, que pas un n'eut à traiter avec les sauuaues, le P. Vimont demanda à Mons. des Chastelets commis general si nous serions de pire condition sous eux que sous Messieurs de la Compagnie? La conclusion fut que non, & que cela iroit pour nous à l'ordinaire, mais que nous le fissions doucement.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, Vol. XXV, p. 77.

²¹ *Ibid.*, Vol. XXVII, p. 99.

²² C. de Rochemonteix, *Les Jésuites en la Nouvelle-France au XVII^e siècle* (Paris, 1895-6), Vol. II, p. 527.

²³ Gustave Lanctôt, "Un parlement colonial au temps de Louis XIV, 1647-1663", *Revue d'Histoire des Colonies*, Vol. XLVI, n° 148-149 (1955), p. 284.

Le P. Vimont luy adiousta qu'on en donneroit aduis au P. Buteux, & M. des Chastelets le touuua bon.²⁴

Father Jacques Buteux, besides being superior of the mission at Trois-Rivières, was keenly interested in the trading possibilities of the upper Saint-Maurice valley and made two missionary journeys northwards towards Hudson Bay. Interest in fur trade possibilities did not necessarily indicate an intention to pursue commerce as an end in itself. In 1649, for example, Ragueneau informed the General of the Society of Jesus that in spite of an increase in personnel the Huron mission had become self-sufficient and would not require increased pecuniary assistance because, among other factors, "la chasse et la pêche sont plus abondantes que par le passé".²⁵ Nevertheless, the suspicion that more than necessary and immediate needs were met through fur trading persisted. In October 1647 Father Lalemant began an inquiry into the charge that members of his clergy had attempted to ship a case of furs to France for Noel Juchereau des Châtelets, prominent in religious as well as commercial circles.²⁶ It seems that Juchereau had 100 pounds of beaver pelts which he did not wish to sell to the company store and had obtained a letter of exchange drawn on the Society of Jesus in France for 400 *livres*. Suspicion of the Jesuit involvement lived on. By 1651 the Society had spent about 5,000 *livres* for relief work among the Huron refugees on the island of Orleans and Father Ragueneau proposed the sale of peltries obtained in Huron country the previous season, estimated to be worth about 20,000 *livres*, be assigned to this aspect of missionary work.²⁷ The *abbé* Faillon, who was as generous as any writer in his treatment of this subject, suggested that the lay helpers, the *donnés*, brought the furs, not the Jesuits. The distinction is a specious one for two reasons. Firstly, the missionaries acknowledged that they traded to support their missions, especially after the generous bequests of pious French laymen, including a not unimportant number of wealthy widows, marshalled by such semi-secret organizations as the Compagnie du Très Saint-Sacrement de l'Autel, began to dwindle. Secondly, the right of the *donnés* to engage in the fur trade was not questioned because their wages were ridiculously low.

The Jesuits further defended their trading activities in the Indian encampments and villages with the argument that they had a politico-diplomatic role to play and that trade goods had to be transported

²⁴ *Journal des Jésuites*, November 15, 1645, p. 13.

²⁵ A. Carayon, *Première Mission des Jésuites en Canada* (Paris, 1864), March 1, 1649, pp. 233-236.

²⁶ A.S.Q., *Documents Faribault*, No. 76, October 21, 1647.

²⁷ Thwaites, *op. cit.*, Vol. XXXVI, p. 250.

to their mission stations in order to defray the costs of expensive hinterland posts essential "to win those people to Jesus Christ and to restore peace among them".²⁸ During the first contacts with the Hurons the Jesuits had argued that their presence was essential to the continuation of the fur trade, but even their *Relations* indicate quite clearly that the opposite was true — the Jesuit presence was tolerated only because of the Huron attachment to the fur trade. Champlain had made it quite clear in 1634 that acceptance of the missionaries was a condition of the French alliance.²⁹ The Recollets had met similar hostility from the Montagnais and the Neutrals.³⁰ Whereas certain colonists charged that the missionaries protected favourite traders who remained in the upper country beyond the reach of the law and the monopolists, the Jesuits replied that their commercial activities provided the sole support of meeting "expenses incurred for the preservation of the country", the price of effective diplomacy among the tribesmen.³¹ That the French incursion into Iroquois Confederacy country was effective can be seen in the prohibition issued by Massachusetts in June 1650, to trade with French, Dutch and other foreigners as well as "any English living amongst them, or under them", a prohibition which was extended in May 1653 to the transporting of any supplies to the French colony, and four months later to the requirement of special licences for trading with the French or their allies.³² The Dutch, too, associated French trading success with the presence of the Catholic missionaries among the tribesmen.³³

Charges of Jesuit involvement in the fur trade persisted to the point that the Provincial in Paris and the General in Rome ordered full investigations. Both the General and the Provincial were satisfied the charges were unsubstantiated and the former advised that the

²⁸ Thwaites, *op. cit.*, Vol. XLIII, pp. 169-171.

²⁹ Bruce G. Trigger, "The French Presence in Huronia: The Structure of Franco-Huron Relations in the First Half of the Seventeenth Century", *Canadian Historical Review*, Vol. XLIX, No. 2 (June, 1968), pp. 122-123; H. P. Biggar, ed., *The Works of Samuel de Champlain* (Toronto, 1922-36), Vol. V, p. 131; Thwaites, *op. cit.*, Vol. VI, p. 19; Vol. VII, pp. 47, 217; Vol. VIII, p. 71, 91, 99; Vol. XV, pp. 51, 55; Vol. XVII, p. 115; Vol. XX, p. 54; Vol. XXI, p. 213.

³⁰ Edwin Tross, ed., *Histoire du Canada et Voyages que les Frères mineurs Recollets y ont faits par G. Sagard* (Paris, 1866), Vol. II, p. 333; J. G. Shea, ed., *Chrétien Le Clercq: First Establishment of the Faith in New France* (New York, 1881), Vol. I, p. 267.

³¹ E. B. O'Callaghan, ed., *Documents Relative to the Colonial History of the State of New York* (Albany, 1853-87), Vol. IX, pp. 5-7, 120; also P. Margry, *Découvertes et Etablissements des Français dans l'Ouest et dans le Sud de l'Amérique septentrionale* (Paris, 1879), vol. I, pp. 303, 322-34.

³² N. B. Shurtleff, ed., *Records of the Governor and Company of the Massachusetts Bay in New England* (Boston, 1854), Vol. IV, Pt. I, pp. 21-22.

³³ J. F. Jameson, ed., *Narratives of New Netherland, 1607-1664* (New York, 1909), pp. 173, 274; B. Fernow, ed., *Documents relating to the History of the Dutch and Swedish Settlements* (Albany, 1877), Vol. XIII, pp. 27, 30-40; Vol. XIV, pp. 415, 484.

missionaries in Canada be warned to abstain "even from all appearance of trading" in order to remove forever the suspicions that they misused what had been called "the coin of Canada".³⁴ There is no indication the missionaries in the field altered their views. There is indication that suspicions and accusations persisted. How was Governor Jean de Lauzon's ordinance forbidding all persons to trade with the Indians established on the Jesuit estates received? It is not known. But it was necessary for Father Pierre Chaumonot to reassure the Iroquois that the missionaries were not primarily pursuing commercial objectives by coming to them.³⁵ How did the Jesuits discharge their debt to Charles Sevestre of 8,000 *livres* and an equal weight of beaver pelts when the latter was pressed by the Governor for immediate payment of a larger debt he owed the monopoly company?³⁶ We do not know, but we better appreciate the argument that some trading to meet immediate expenses be distinguished from trading for commercial gain.

Not many years after his arrival in the colony, Bishop Laval intervened on the behalf of his clergy at Montreal. The trader, Jean Le Ber, noted for his "sedition" in opposing the opening of a public magazine in Montreal, was stopped on his way to that town to give account of the goods he transported for the clergy and was levied a duty of 2 *sols* on each pound value of goods he transported for this purpose. The Bishop demanded an immediate rescinding of the Council of Quebec's decision on the grounds that it represented an infringement of the rights and privileges of the church, or in his words "something which has not to the present been practiced in this country and which is contrary to the rights of the church".³⁷ More serious difficulties lay ahead for Laval. In 1660, Jean Peronne Dumesnil launched an investigation into the alleged fraud and peculation of the Community of Habitants — claiming that 3,000,000 *livres* would have to be returned to the Treasury — and identified a close relationship between the clergy and certain monopolists. Bishop Laval and Father Ragueneau, who left for France in 1662, were to seek to obtain an annulment of Dumesnil's writs. Dumesnil's charges included the assertion that between 1652 and 1653 an inhabitant named René Maheux had traded 20,000 *livres* worth of furs

³⁴ F. Martin, ed., *Mission du Canada: Relations inédites des Jésuites, 1672-1680* (Paris: 1861), Vol. II, p. 344. Also cited in Mack Eastman, *Church and State in Early Canada* (Edinburgh, 1915), p. 85; Rochemonteix, *op. cit.*, Vol. II, pp. 176-77.

³⁵ A.S.Q., *Polygraphie* XIII, No. 27, Ordinance of May 12, 1656; *Relations des Jésuites dans la Nouvelle-France* (Québec, 1858), Vol. II, pp. 16-17.

³⁶ *Journal des Jésuites*, November 23, 1657, p. 227; Thwaites, *op. cit.*, Vol. XLIII, p. 73.

³⁷ A.A.Q., *Registre A.*, No. 24, Laval to Avaugour, June 13, 1662, p. 26; *Journal des Jésuites*, September 15, 16, 1662, p. 312.

for Father Paul Ragueneau, and that in 1657 the Jesuits had taken 6,000 *livres* over and above their regular allowance "and this in one year according to the accounts, besides what is not entered in these". Realizing the difficulties of documenting a clandestine operation, Dumesnil employed the drastic procedure of forcing his way into the study of Guillaume Audouart, secretary of the Council of Quebec, in order to seize the incriminating evidence he required. The Sovereign Council, to which Bishop Laval had named some of the principal traders of the Community of Habitants when requested by Governor-elect de Mézy to nominate the first incumbents, accused Dumesnil at its second meeting of employing force to obtain commercial papers, commissioned the traders Rouer de Villeray and Jean Bourdon (both much involved in the investigation) with two sergeants, a locksmith and 10 archers to loot Dumesnil's office, sequester the papers and in effect destroy the evidence he had accumulated.³⁸ Dumesnil was fortunate to return to France alive; his son Michel had been murdered in the streets of Quebec in 1661 by four leading members of the Community and Governor Argenson had had the father's plea struck from the court records. The Commissioner of the Marine at La Rochelle apprized Colbert of the unsavoury situation :

Il est bien important que vous soyez Instruit des choses que scait cest homme la, et des peculat qu'il se mette en estat de prouver nonobstant la spoliation de ses papiers. Comme la chose est de longue haleine et qu'il est bon d'espargner un peu les pères Jesuittes qui se trouvent fort interessez dans le raport de ce bon homme la, je croy qu'il faudroit que vous commissiez le soin de l'entendre à quelque Maistre de requetes fort discret, pour vous faire ensuite le raport de ce que l'on auroit seu de luy.³⁹

Louis Gaudais-Dupont, who was well received by the monopolists at Quebec and who was related by marriage to the Giffards, had been named royal commissioner in May 1663 with the task of "examining Canada", but his report, which is not extant, was immediately challenged by Dumesnil. The Commissioner at La Rochelle reaffirmed his belief that Dumesnil's papers would have provided incriminating evidence : "Point a doubter que dans ces papiers il n'y eust des choses dont on a voulu absolument supprimer la conessence."⁴⁰

³⁸ *Jugements et délibérations du Conseil souverain de la Nouvelle-France* (Québec, 1885-91), Vol. I, pp. 4, 135-36; P. G. Roy, "Jean Péronne Dumesnil et ses Mémoires", *Bulletin de Recherches Historiques*, Vol. XXI (1915), pp. 161-173, 193-200.

³⁹ *P.A.C., Mélanges de Colbert*, vol. XVI, Colbert de Terron to Colbert, March 9, 1663, fol. 539.

⁴⁰ P. G. Roy, "Mémoire du Sieur Gaudais Dupont à Mgr Colbert", *Bulletin de Recherches Historiques*, Vol. XXI (1915), pp. 227-231; *P.A.C., Mélanges de Colbert*, Vol. CXIX, Colbert de Terron to Colbert, February 8, 1664, fol. 181; January 7, 1664, fol. 41; March 5, 1664, fol. 732.

In the colony further action was taken to stamp out the accusations made against the clergy. Father François Le Mercier presented a request to Lieutenant-General de Tracy, Governor Courcelles and Intendant Jean Talon for an investigation of the charges made by the former Governor, Saffray de Mézy, to the effect that the Jesuits traded alcoholic beverages and furs with the Indians while denying ordinary inhabitants the same privilege, and that the ordinary colonists were afraid to speak out against oppression and illicit trade because they were enslaved by their directors of conscience.⁴¹ Mézy engaged in a brief but bitter struggle for power with the Bishop and the Bishop's appointees on the Sovereign Council. Only a fatal illness brought him to a reconciliation with Laval and a last will and testament which left most of his goods to his former enemies, including Villeray whom he had once violently attacked. Furthermore, much as in the case of Dumesnil's evidence, some of de Mézy's papers which were being kept for Lieutenant-General de Tracy were seized, torn and burned and his enemies boasted they would never be found.⁴² These events did little to allay suspicions or stem the tide of "calumnies".

In June 1664, an illiterate *habitant* was condemned by the Sovereign Council of Quebec to pay reparations to the Jesuits for having falsely accused them of illicit trading and all offensive statements made against the Society were ordered expunged from the court records.⁴³ There is great probability that the accusations had been substantially correct, for the following November 26 their attorney, Martin Boutet, appeared before the Sovereign Council to assert that although the Jesuits were not pursuing the fur trade for its own ends they had a right to trade to meet their missionary mandate and to affirm that if the Jesuits had further obligations to meet, payment would necessarily be made in wines, brandy and local currency.⁴⁴ When Father Jacques Frémin was named Superior of the Cap-de-la-Magdeleine mission in August 1665, in an area where temporal affairs were reportedly good, for Father Charles Albanel had been active in the region for fifteen years, he was specifically instructed that he was relieved from any responsibility for the conduct of the fur trade in order to devote his energies to the instruction of the Montagnais and Algonkians.⁴⁵

Shortly thereafter Radisson was told in Paris that if he wished to engage in trade in Hudson's Bay he should associate himself

⁴¹ P. G. Roy, ed., *Ordonnances, commissions, etc. des gouverneurs et intendants de la Nouvelle-France, 1639-1706* (Beauceville, 1924), Vol. I, pp. 28-31.

⁴² *Jugements*, Vol. I, p. 346.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, Vol. I, pp. 195-6.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, Vol. I, pp. 300-01.

⁴⁵ *Journal des Jésuites*, August 17, 1665, p. 333.

with La Chesnaye, who was in turn close to the Jesuits. Radisson conferred with La Chesnaye for two days, returned to England to attempt to persuade his wife to visit France, then returned to Paris where he now knew how to proceed with his commercial venture. He wrote in his journal :

I went to take my leave of Monsieur Colbert, acquainting him of my design, whereof he approved very well. He wished me a good voyage, advising me to be careful. I went to visit the Society of the Jesuits at Paris, as being also concerned with De La Chesnaye in the beaver trade. They gave me some money for my voyage.⁴⁶

If Radisson's efforts did not result in French control of the lucrative Hudson's Bay trade it was in good measure, wrote one priest, because the religious "n'en sommes pas les maistres et on ne consulte pas sur ces matieres ceux qui s'y connoissent le mieux et qui ont moins d'interest à tromper".⁴⁷

In addition to interest in Hudson's Bay the Jesuits were said to be involved in the illicit trade to the Hudson River. A Dutch letter of 1670 contains the following information :

Four Frenchmen came with a renegade Jesuit, as we afterward heard. He was arrested as a spy, but there was no proof and he had a pass from the governor of Canada, so that we let him go.⁴⁸

Frontenac had no sooner arrived at Quebec as Governor than he took up the cry that the clergy were waxing wealthy on the returns of the fur trade. In a coded message to Colbert he reported having encouraged the Jesuits to intensify their efforts in the direction of Indian evangelization but it was obvious to him their prime interests were elsewhere :

Mais quelque mine qu'ils fassent, ils ne veulent point entendre ce langage, et pour vous parler franchement, ils songent autant à la conversion du Castor, qu'à celle des âmes, car la plupart de leurs missions sont de pures moqueries.⁴⁹

Two years later he returned to the charge that they were still basically interested in the "conversion of the beaver". The King's orders in 1676 dealt with the accusations, and as in so many cases merely repeated the suggestions that had come from the colonial officials. These orders said in part :

Sur le sujet du commerce et de la traite, je suis bien aise de vous dire que vous ne devez point souffrir qu'aucune personne constituée en dignité ecclésiastique ou séculière ou communauté en fasse aucun

⁴⁶ A. T. Adams, ed., *The Explorations of Pierre Esprit Radisson* (Minneapolis, 1961), pp. 165-66.

⁴⁷ B.N., *Papiers Villermont*, Bernou to Villermont, April 10, 1685, fol. 16.

⁴⁸ A. J. F. van Laer, ed., *Correspondence of Jeremias van Rensselaer, 1651-1674* (Albany, 1932), p. 440.

⁴⁹ A.P.Q., *Manuscrits II*, Vol. II, Frontenac to Colbert, November 2, 1672, p. 647.

sous quelque pretexte que ce soit, ny mesme aucune traite de pelleteries et je ne crois pas necessaire de vous dire que pour montrer l'exemple vous ne devez point souffrir qu'aucun de vos domestiques ny autre personne se serve de vostre nom ou de vostre autorité pour en faire aucun et mesme je vous deffends de donner jamais aucun congé ny permission pour la traite.⁵⁰

Ostensibly the clergy were being reprimanded for their trading activities, but since the letter was despatched to the Governor the warning directed to his household and entourage was most significant. The following year the royal despatches indicated surprise that the clergy persisted in trading and the King warned that the full weight of his displeasure would be brought to bear on them unless they desisted.⁵¹ Lahontan corroborated Frontenac's charges in commenting on police regulations for the traders who went to the Illinois country "as if for the maintenance of the Jesuit missionaries" and who were employed in reality by those who "care less for the salvation of all these poor barbarians than for increasing the revenues of their houses by the prodigious number of canoes of beaver which they send to Quebec under the name of Tiber and Gautier".⁵²

In 1676 Louis XIV ordered an investigation :

Sur ce que vous dites de la facilité que les Ecclesiastiques seculiers et reguliers ont de faire la traite des pelleteries par le moyen des missions vous devez examiner avec le Sieur du Chesneau les moyens de l'empescher. Ce vous doit estre assez facile par le moyen de l'establissemens des marchez, et des autres reglemens de police, et en cas que vous ayez besoin de mon autorité en m'envoyant vos avis. Je donneray les ordres que j'estimeray necessaire a cet effect.⁵³

The following year Frontenac unleashed a barrage of attacks against the Jesuits and those associated with them in the fur trade. The priests at the Missions Étrangères in Paris were disturbed by the possible outcome although Dudouyt assured them that "M. de Québec apporte un grand soin pour oter tout soupçon".⁵⁴ Frontenac charged that Father Frémin had made a profit of 4,000 livres in the Magdeleine and Sault St. Louis region, that Chaumonot had promised all manner of merchandise from the Jesuit stores, that one of the de Lambervilles had told La Salle how to send beaver pelts out by New Amsterdam to avoid the controls, that the Indians were warned not to trade except at the Jesuit store, that a fellow named Denison had surprised two canoes belonging to the missionaries loaded with

⁵⁰ A.P.Q., *Ordres du Roi*, Vol. VII, King to Frontenac, April 1676, p. 30.

⁵¹ P.A.C., *Series B*, Vol. VII, King to Frontenac, April 28, 1677, p. 153.

⁵² Gustave Lanctôt, ed., "Instructive Summary of the Affairs of Canada", *The Oakes Collection: New Documents by Lahontan Concerning Canada and Newfoundland* (Ottawa, 1940), p. 25.

⁵³ P.A.C., *Series B*, Vol. VII, King to Frontenac, April 1676, p. 44, followed by similar orders on April 28, 1677, p. 153.

⁵⁴ P.A.C., A.S.M.E., Vol. VI, Memorandum of April 9, 1677, fol. 6, p. 485.

tobacco, that another trader called Allain had similarly surprised five canoes loaded with furs for the priests at Prairie de la Magdeleine, that a Jesuit missionary had invited Sieur d'Allerais to engage in trade with New York, and that the Jesuits had chased away their valet Robert because he divulged the extent of this forbidden trade.⁵⁵ The loading of furs on fishing vessels at Percé for shipment to Spain and Holland was attributed to merchants closely associated with the Jesuits.⁵⁶ Clandestine trade was difficult to prove but it was equally difficult to disprove involvement. Dudouyt was alarmed in 1682 that letters had been seized which clearly demonstrated clerical involvement in the fur trade and were being employed in Paris to draw up 52 specific charges against the Bishop of Quebec, the Intendant and the Jesuits.⁵⁷ The previous year the more serious charge that the efforts to control the brandy traffic were attempts on the part of the clergy to reserve this highly profitable trade for themselves had been made in Paris :

Un des principaux et de mieux intentionnés dist hier que le mal était qu'on ne convenoit du principe qui consiste en ce que Monsieur levesque et les Jésuites defendent leau de vie *pour en traitter seuls*.⁵⁸

All these views perpetuated the belief that the Jesuits were associated with a "commerce qu'ils continuent encore nonobstant des defences que le Roy a esté obligé de leur en faire".⁵⁹ The prominent role of the "mission Indians" as intermediaries in the illicit trade with the English colonies is already well known. Delanglez has insisted upon the unproven nature of these charges, but it would seem to us that the nature of illicit and contraband trade is much more important to historical interpretation. The frequency of charges against the clergy and the clerical concern not to abuse what they considered essential and legitimate activity in a new mission field, confirm the existence of covert commerce. Only its volume and value are undetermined and will remain so because of the undocumented and secretive nature of the activity.

Did the Recollets engage in trade as did the disciples of Loyola? In spite of Sixte le Tac's insistence that the Recollets, unlike the Jesuits, "ne courent ny après les Pelleteries ny après le bien", it would seem that they did so, but they thought it necessary to justify their involvement as being essential to survival in a mission field and particularly enjoined because of the lack of Jesuit co-operation :

... ce qui est scandale en un pais ne l'est pas en l'autre et que ce qui est deffendu icy est permis là; puis la nécessité n'a point de

⁵⁵ B.N., *Fonds Clairambault*, Vol. 1016, fol. 44, p. 3.

⁵⁶ A.C., *Series F3*, Vol. VI, Ordinance of De Meulles, September 24, 1683, fol. 45.

⁵⁷ A.S.Q., *Lettres N.*, No. 61, Dudouyt to Laval, March 9, 1682.

⁵⁸ A.S.Q., *Séminaire XV*, No. 22, Dudouyt to Laval, June 15, 1681.

⁵⁹ B.N., *Fonds Clairambault*, Vol. 1016, fol. 43, p. 3.

lieu; ils le vouloient ainsy eux mesmes (Jesuits) ils y contraignoient nos pères en ne leur donnant rien.⁶⁰

The Recollet rationalization, far from denying an involvement in the fur trade and fishery, argued the necessity of this commerce to supply immediate needs. It may not be unimportant that Father Georges Le Baillif acted as deputy of the *habitants* of New France in the trade monopoly negotiations with such important Dutch and French merchants as Louis Vermeulen, Mathieu Duisterloo, Daniel Boyer and Lucas Legendre in 1622.⁶¹

Did the secular priests of St. Sulpice engage in the fur trade as did the regular clergy? They denied any involvement in commerce. The history of the colonization of the island of Montreal, of which they became the seigneurs, is a fascinating account of other-worldly mystical enterprise and the most highly organized human activism. From its foundations, Ville-Marie manifested dual objectives — the site was chosen because of its obvious commercial and agricultural potential and at the same time only the most elevated spiritual values and objectives were tolerated. The company of zealous associates who obtained the island "in full property, justice and seigneurie" were bound by a clause not to engage in the fur trade with the "savages" or any other persons whatsoever except it be "for their own use and for the necessity of their persons only".⁶² An anonymous missionary suggested in 1671 that all trade goods transported by the clergy should be confiscated because their presence was an infallible proof that such ecclesiastics were engaged in commerce.⁶³ The Sulpicians were aware of the illicit trading activities of civil officials and reported, for example, that Governor Perrot of Montreal had, in 1681, sold 40,000 *livres* of pelts and in 1683 had sold 100,000 *livres* at Niort.⁶⁴ This information is essential in any evaluative judgment of alleged clerical trading activity. It indicates both the strong drive to trade and the relative modesty in both volume and value of the commerce attributed to the Catholic clergy.

On the other hand, the correspondence of Monsieur Tronson gives us evidence of Sulpician trading activity for the maintenance

⁶⁰ Réveillaud, *op. cit.*, pp. 123-4; A.P.Q., *Manuscrits II*, Vol. I, January 18, 1622, p. 31.

⁶¹ Robert Le Blant et René Baudry, eds., *Nouveaux Documents sur Champlain et son époque* (Ottawa, 1967), vol. I, n° 185, pp. 432-441.

⁶² A.S.S., *Carton B (Mélanges)*, No. 27, Articles of December 17, 1640, pp. 169-70; *Edits et Ordonnances*, vol. I, p. 22.

⁶³ A.A.Q., *Eglise du Canada*, Anonymous report of 1671., vol. VI, pp. 8-9.

⁶⁴ B.S.S.P., *Tronson Correspondence*, Vol. I, Nos. 189, 210, fols. 313, 345, 397. Perrot answered his accusers in the same terms as the clergy replied to their accusers — Canada had little specie, the common currency was beaver, and trade was necessary for meeting the high living costs in Canada. Cf. A.C., *Series F3*, Vol. II, Memorandum of Perrot, March 1682, fol. 97.

of their Indian missions. The mission on the shores of Lake Ontario would have to be abandoned in 1677 if it was impossible to pursue the fur trade :

Il ne faut plus avoir de valets qui traittent. Apres ce que Mons. l'Intendant vous a dit il n'y a plus a deliberer. C'est assez pour ne le plus souffrir qu'il y ait un ordre de la Cour qui le deffende. Ce sera un surcroit et je ne scay si nous serons en estat de la porter longtemps.⁶⁵

The Superior in Paris was disturbed by petty incidents, such as the charge that Dollier de Casson had taken wampum from one of the Indians, but especially disturbed by the charge that his secular priests were sending furs to France under assumed names. Whether these transactions had occurred or not, he warned the Montreal clergy of the gravity of such operations :

On me dit qu'il y a quelques uns de nos Messrs. qui sous des noms empruntez envoient des pelteries en cette ville; et qu'on leur renvoie en suite de l'argent. Je ne scay pas surement si cela est vray mais j'ay de *grands fondements de le soupçonner* sur les bruits qui en courent. Or vous pouvez juger combien cela nous seroit tort et combien l'œuvre de Dieu souffriroit si on alloit s'imaginer que nous trafiquons comme infalliblement on en seroit persuadé et dans le monde et à la cour si l'on continuait ce commerce.⁶⁶

Tronson forbade the Gentlemen of St. Sulpice to trade furs in future. In 1682 he again advocated the abandonment of the mission station at Quinté and observed that "so long as we keep young men there people will be persuaded we share with them the profits of the trade".⁶⁷ A Sulpician missionary could not help observing that the Jesuits had built their church at Prairie de la Magdeleine from the returns of the fur trade and surely godly competition in the Lord's vineyard should permit them to do likewise. In 1668 François Dollier de Casson and René de Bréhaut de Galinée, Sulpicians, claimed the area around Lakes Ontario and Erie for the French Crown and to Colbert's delight the expedition cost the French exchequer nothing because the furs garnered en route covered the expenses. Tronson's argument was that the Sulpicians should be different from the Jesuits, but the difference could only have been very relative.

Were the women's communities involved in the fur trade? One would scarcely classify them as members of the clergy; nevertheless their religious vocation and their establishment in the chief towns serve to complement the observations made about a clergy that was by and large missionary and not parochial. Part of the

⁶⁵ B.S.S.P., *Tronson Correspondence*, Vol. I, Tronson to LeFebvre, April 5, 1677, pp. 54-55.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, Vol. I, Tronson to Lefebvre, June 20, 1677, pp. 107-8.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, Vol. I, No. 165, Tronson to Dollier de Casson, May 15, 1682, p. 288.

answer may be contained in certain incidents that transpired at Quebec in 1647. The Community of Habitants confiscated more than 260 pounds of beaver pelts registered in the name of the chaplain of the Ursulines. He had boasted of his trading activities on behalf of the nuns and of the good price he would require at the Company warehouse.⁶⁸ There may have been some relationship between this incident and the return to France in the autumn of M. le Prieur. There may also have been some direct relationship with the special consultation among Fathers Le Jeune, Vimont and Jérôme Lalemant held the following month about the advisability of continuing the beaver trade at the Sillery reservation. What was the responsibility of a confessor who became aware of illicit trading practices? Could the missionaries in good conscience condone contravention of the company's monopoly rights? It was decided that if the prices paid for pelts at the warehouse of the Community of Habitants were reasonable the missionaries were bound not to divert trade elsewhere. But if the prices were unreasonable then they might "with good conscience dissimulate, the habitants having the right by nature and from the King to trade".⁶⁹ The final conclusion, and this may have been particularly related to the Ursuline's experience, was that the missionaries should not carry on trade at Sillery. The Jesuit viewpoint seems to have been that a natural inalienable right was involved; nevertheless, what was lawful was not always expedient.

The Hospital Nuns, it was revealed in 1658, had employed the merchant Louis Couillard de Lespinay for a number of years as their intermediary in the remunerative trade. Their contract with this prominent merchant was terminated because it was found to have been entered into "by persons not qualified to engage in the fur trade". The *Journal des Jésuites* comments as follows:

Fut condamné par M. Chartier le sieur Lepinay avec ses associés, sçavoir les meres Hospitalieres, & le contract de société fut cassé, à raison qu'il estoit fait entre des personnes incapables de traiter, telles que sont les religieuses. L'histoire de cette société est longue.⁷⁰

Lespinay had for a number of years engaged in a profitable fur trading and seal hunting enterprise in the Tadoussac and Malbaie region. Indeed, he had some contact with Dutch traders and had Father Charles Albanel as a frequent travel companion. The incident with the Hospital Nuns cannot be regarded as typical, however, because most of the references in the archives of the *religieuses* to furs concern gifts and not commercial transactions.⁷¹

⁶⁸ *Journal des Jésuites*, June 29, 1647, p. 90; Thwaites, *op. cit.*, Vol. XXX, p. 183.

⁶⁹ *Journal des Jésuites*, July 19, 1647, pp. 91-92.

⁷⁰ *Journal des Jésuites*, March 31, 1658, p. 233.

⁷¹ A.H.D.Q., *Lettres I*, Cramoisy to Mother Superior, April 18, 1654; April 18, 1655.

We return to the problem, unresolved yet, of determining what proportion of goods destined to the clergy was for domestic use, what proportion was for gifts and what proportion was for barter with the Indians. Goods which eventually passed into Indian hands did not necessarily do so as a result of a commercial transaction. Even when it is established that trade articles were bartered by the missionaries and their agents or servants for furs, it does not follow of necessity that such a transaction was motivated by a desire for gain. Trade could and sometimes did arise out of a need to satisfy immediate requirements.

In conclusion, we see that Witthoft's observation about the earliest fur trade being shrouded by a conspiracy of silence is true of much of seventeenth century fur trade history. Rochemonteix, in a valiant effort to justify clerical actions (an effort resembling much of the nineteenth century histories and biographies centring on New France which were written to support causes of beatification and canonization),⁷² cited Lahontan, the arch anti-clerical, as saying :

Plusieurs personnes m'ont assuré que les Jésuites faisaient un grand commerce de marchandises d'Europe et de pelleteries du Canada, mais j'ai de la peine à le croire, ou si cela est, il faut qu'ils aient des correspondants aussi fin qu'eux: ce qui ne saurait être.⁷³

The opinion of Lahontan relative to the inability to hide a clandestine trade runs counter to known facts. It is not only possible but it is probable that the volume and value of illicit trade cannot be ascertained. The undocumented and secretive nature of the undertaking is sufficient to establish such a hypothesis. If clerical participation in the fur trade cannot be established by numerous and detailed documents, nevertheless there are a few supporting pieces of evidence. We must conclude that the fact that clandestine activity is rarely subject to meticulous and definitive documentation is an important criterion. On the other hand, impartiality and objectivity demand that the anti-clerical, defamatory and self-interested nature of much of the unfavourable documentation (not to speak of sometimes wild and unfounded accusations by contemporaries) be borne in mind. Much of the documentation both *pro* and *con* the question of the involvement of the clergy in the fur trade relates to opinion and not to proven facts. The accused were unable to clear themselves satisfactorily and the accusers were unable to press their charges adequately. The question remained a contested issue, much ink flowed both defending the missionaries and accusing them. The history of repeated

⁷² A systematic study of the historiography of New France has been undertaken by Professor Serge Gagnon and his research into this question will be of the utmost importance to historians.

⁷³ Rochemonteix, *op. cit.*, Vol. III, pp. 134-35, note 2.

prohibitions and warnings, from church as well as state officials, indicates the importance attributed to the question and suggests the probable continuing existence of illicit trade. For the historian today these may be more relevant considerations than the ability or inability to prove that the Catholic clergy engaged from the time of first contact in North America in the lucrative fur trade.