

“Challenges and Conflict in Nineteenth Century Francophone Evangelization: Jules Bourgoin and the Pointe-aux-Trembles School”¹

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“In the group, we could pick out a tall young man, thin and upright like the letter ‘I’. He appeared a bit nervous, but he had a great deal of energy and his gaze alone was enough to make us understand that he had come to Canada to do useful work. He willingly engaged in conversation, was charming in his way of doing things, knew how to make himself liked and in only a short time made friends. This man was Jules Bourgoin!”

– R.-P. Duclos, on the arrival of Bourgoin to Montreal in 1868²

I. Introduction

The work sponsored by the French Canadian Missionary Society (FCMS) had already spanned more than a generation by the time Mr. Jules Bourgoin arrived in Montreal.³ Duclos, in his history of French Protestantism in North America, notes that this tall and thin man was part of a fourth significant group of missionaries to be attracted to the work in Lower Canada. Though the work had already begun so much time before Bourgoin arrived, he seemed to enter at a period when the personnel and structures were finally gaining momentum.⁴ Shortly after Bourgoin arrived in Quebec, the Annual Report of the FCMS included these words:

There can be no doubt that the French Canadian people are now more open to receive the Gospel than they were some years ago. They are becoming more independent, asserting the right to think for themselves on the matters of religion, and are perusing the bible, notwithstanding the prohibitions of the priests, who see this dawning freedom of opinion, and set themselves to suppress it...No doubt this awakening is the result of education, the circulation of God’s Word, and the evangelistic labors of this and other societies.”⁵

¹ Some of the material in this essay appeared in French as “Jules Bourgoin et la mission de l’Institut de la Pointe-aux-Trembles,” *Bulletin de la société d’histoire du protestantisme franco-québécois* 32 (juin 2011), pp. 1-5. I thank Richard Loughheed and Jean-Louis Lalonde for comments on an earlier draft.

² R.-P. Duclos, *Histoire du protestantisme français au Canada et aux Etats-Unis*, vol. 1 (Trois-Rivières, Collection d’or. 1998), p. 299. Unless otherwise stated, all translations from French language documents are my own.

³ More background on the FCMS and French Protestantism can be found in the various essays of Jason Zuidema, ed. *French-Speaking Protestants in Canada: Historical Essays* (Leiden, Brill, 2011).

⁴ See, for example, the positive comments in the *30th Annual Report of the French Canadian Missionary Society, 1869* (Montreal, Becket, 1869), p. 5.

⁵ FCMS Annual Report (1874), p. 4. This sentiment is seen also in the *Feuille religieuse du canton de Vaud*, 1866, p. 416.

No doubt, this increasing optimism could be and was challenged by others within and outside of French Canada. However, it was in this narrative of missionary progress that Jules Bourgoïn would labour for the rest of his life.

II. Context

Although a few French-speaking Protestants had been in French Canada since the time of colonization, their numbers never amounted to much, even in the generations after the English Conquest in 1759-60.⁶ It was only in the wake of the 18th and 19th century Protestant religious awakenings in the rest of North America and in Europe that structures were put in place to augment their numbers.

The English Conquest created both greater opportunities for and greater resistance to French Protestantism. The English had the often difficult balancing act between the promotion of English cultural values (including the attachment to Protestantism) and the desire to keep the peace with the French-speaking Roman Catholic population.⁷ For their part, the Roman Catholic clergy were quick to accept the lordship of the English in order to retain many of the privileges other Roman Catholic clergy had lost by poor diplomacy.⁸ Although the English showed peculiar favour to French Protestants, they did not actively seek for the conversion of others for fear of public unrest.⁹ With the government in the hands of the English, the majority of the French Roman Catholic population now looked more directly to the Church for leadership.¹⁰

For almost three-quarters of a century following the English conquest, French Protestant work in Lower Canada received little interest.¹¹ Significant interest began because of the confluence of visions of various groups affected by the 17th and 18th century Evangelical revivals in Europe and North America. Although many participating in this renewed vision for French Protestantism in Lower Canada did not deny their desires for the political and cultural assimilation of French Canadians, it was not the main motivation of the network of those interested in encouraging French evangelicalism. Rather, the primary motivation, that is, if their testimony is to be believed, was to impart what they believed was the liberating message of salvation based on their reading of Scripture.¹² Even though

⁶ On the life of French Protestants in this period see Jean-Louis Lalonde, *Des loups dans la bergerie: Les Protestants de langue française au Québec 1534-2000* (Montreal, Fides, 2002), pp. 30-38.

⁷ Lalonde, *Des loups*, p. 39.

⁸ Terry Crowley, "The French Regime to 1760," in *A Concise History of Christianity in Canada*, ed. Terrence Murphy and Roberto Perrin (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1996), p. 54.

⁹ See Gilles Chaussé, "French Canada from Conquest to 1840," in *A Concise History of Christianity in Canada*, p. 57. Also, Lalonde, *Des loups*, pp. 39-41.

¹⁰ Chaussé remarks: "Yet in the midst of this collective ordeal there remained one consolation and hope: the Canadiens had not lost their religious leaders. In future they would look to these leaders and cling to their church with fierce determination." Chaussé, "French Canada from the Conquest to 1840," p. 57.

¹¹ Lalonde, *Des loups*, pp. 49-50.

¹² For a similar thesis see Glen Scorgie, "The French Canadian Missionary Society: A Study in Evangelistic Zeal and Civic Ambition," *Fides et Historia: Journal of the Conference of Faith and History* 36,1 (Winter/Spring 2004), pp. 67ff.

the initial participants had links to multiple Protestant denominations, they generally held to what one group considered “the great evangelical doctrines of the Protestant Faith.”¹³ More specifically, however, all agreed that this soteriological freedom proposed in the evangelical Protestant Gospel was directly opposed to the theological error and social backwardness of French Canadian society under the control of the Roman Catholic Church.¹⁴ Hence, in the thinking of these mission organizations, focusing on spiritual improvement would inevitably lead to intellectual and social improvement.

Even though the mission work in Lower Canada would become increasingly denominational in the latter half of the 19th century, it was largely put in place by two evangelical missions societies in the 1830s and 1840s, *viz.* the Evangelical Society of La Grande Ligne and the French Canadian Missionary Society. Denominational work (ie. Presbyterians, Baptists, Methodists, Congregationalists, and Anglicans) would inherit or work off of the foundations laid by these non-denominational societies. Although the French-speaking European missionaries would also be adopted into denominational work, it was in these non-denominationally affiliated works that they had their most significant impact.

The first of these works, the Evangelical Society of La Grande Ligne, started quite in the mid-1830s. Its roots were found in the *Société des Missions évangéliques de Lausanne*, even though the Lausanne missionary society never considered it one of its official missions. Viewed as sectarian by the established Reformed Church in Lausanne, the Lausanne society took a number of years and one false start before it was finally established in 1826 with the goal of promoting the Gospel among non-Christian peoples.¹⁵ With this vision in mind, the society began a missions institute to train new missionaries and publish frequent news updates in the local religious monthly, the *Feuille religieuse du canton de Vaud*, to promote its activities.¹⁶

Through the work of Henri Olivier, who originally came to minister to the native peoples of North America in 1834, but ended up serving among the French-speaking population of Quebec, a durable team of missionaries was established. Olivier would not remain in North America, but helped facilitate the arrival of Ms.

¹³ *First and Second Annual Report of the French Canadian Missionary Society* (Montreal, Campbell and Becket, 1841), p. 3.

¹⁴ For the Protestant and Roman Catholic visions of the other see: Christine Hudon, “Le prêtre, le ministre et l’apostat. Les stratégies pastorales face au protestantisme canadien-français au XIX^e siècle.” *SCHEC, Études d’histoire religieuse* 61 (1995), pp. 81-99; David-Thierry Ruddel, *Le protestantisme français au Québec, 1840-1919: « Images » et témoignages*. Collection Mercure histoire No. 36 (Ottawa, Musée national de l’homme, 1983), pp. 1-11; Richard Lougheed, *The Controversial Conversion of Charles Chiniquy* (Toronto, Clements Academic, 2009), ch. 5.

¹⁵ Van Butselaar notes that a first *Société vaudoise évangélique des Missions* was created in 1821, but closed the year after by local authorities. Jan van Butselaar, *Africains, missionnaires et colonialistes : Les origines de l’Église Presbytérienne du Mozambique (Mission Suisse), 1880-1896* (Leiden, Brill, 1984), p. 22.

¹⁶ For more on the *Société des Missions évangéliques de Lausanne* (hereafter, SMEL) and the *Feuille religieuse du canton de Vaud* (hereafter, FRCV) see A. Grandjean, *La Mission Romande* (Lausanne, Georges Bridel, 1917), pp. 4ff.; van Butselaar, *Africains, missionnaires et colonialistes*, pp. 22-23 and Dominique Vogt-Raguy, “Les communautés protestantes francophones au Québec: 1834-1925,” (Ph.D thesis, Univ. de Bordeaux III, 1996), pp. 48-49.

Henrietta Feller (née Odin) and Mr. Louis Roussy, especially through his regular contributions to the *Feuille religieuse*.

On their arrival, Feller and Roussy had decided to move away from the large centres of French Canadian Catholicism like Montreal to the rural setting south of Montreal at Grande Ligne.¹⁷ It was here that French Canadian Protestantism started to gain a toehold. In September 1836 and with the blessing of William Plenderleath-Christie, the local seigneur, they began to organize a small congregation in a house lent to them by a recent convert. By 1837 they had witnessed significant growth in the conversion of more than 16 adults and the dedication of a chapel and residential school.¹⁸ They would remain an independent mission, but be supported by Baptists in Upper Canada and, later, also by American Baptists. However, friends in Lausanne were still encouraged to pray for and give liberally to the cause.¹⁹ Although there were still financial difficulties and some threat from Roman Catholic neighbours²⁰, the Grand Ligne mission expanded to include other mission posts, a sizeable educational complex, and an increasing number of eager workers from among the new French Canadian converts.

Because of these successes in the area South of Montreal, other English Protestants began to see possibilities in the province. In the mid-1830s, the Montreal auxiliary committee of the British and Foreign Bible Society began to expand its activity in a few French Canadian parishes. This success led a number of committed Church leaders to form the new *French Canadian Missionary Society*.²¹ This society represented evangelicals from the spectrum of other English

¹⁷ The story of the Grande Ligne mission is one of the better-known stories in French Canadian Protestantism owing in large part to the well-written letters detailing the joys and struggles of the mission that Madame Feller would write for publication in periodicals in North America and Europe. Many of her letters and a great deal of other material is found in the Canadian Baptist Archives at McMaster University (Hamilton, Ontario), fonds ZC1—Mission la Grande Ligne. Some of this material was printed, for example, in the FRCV (1838), pp. 88-96, 216, 525-531, (1839), pp. 239-240, (1841), pp. 216-218, 411, 467-473. Further, a number of articles and books were written promoting the work in the 19th and 20th centuries. See, for example, John Mockett Cramp, ed. *A Memoir of Madame Feller* (Montreal, F.E. Grafton and W. Drysdale, n. d.). Finally, some recent essays have given a more scholarly history of the mission: Randall Balmer and Catherine Randall, "'Her Duty to Canada': Henriette Feller and French Protestantism in Quebec," *Church History* 71,1 (March 2001), pp. 49-72; Lalonde, *Des loups*, pp. 159ff; see also the articles on Feller and Roussy in the *Dictionary of Canadian Biography* (an online version is available).

¹⁸ See Lalonde, *Des loups*, p. 163.

¹⁹ FRCV, (1840), p. 240.

²⁰ See, for example, the account of the Roman Catholic threats directed at Roussy and a fellow-worker in the mission house at St. Pie. Certain Roman Catholics "assembled around the house in crowds, and began what is called a *charivari* (a horning), making a horrible noise, and throwing stones at the Protestants." in N. Cyr, ed. *Memoir of Rev. C.H.O. Cote* (Philadelphia, American Baptist Publication Society, n.d.), p. 33.

²¹ The minute book of the FCMS from 1848-1861 is still extant and is located in the Archives Nationales du Québec in Montréal, Fonds P607/12/1. Most of the annual reports of the society are available on microfiche. There are several articles and monographs dealing with the FCMS: Glen Scorgie, "The French Canadian Missionary Society: A Study in Evangelistic Zeal and Civic Ambition," *Fides et Historia: Journal of the Conference of Faith and History* 36,1 (Winter/Spring 2004), pp. 67-81; Jean-Louis Lalonde, *Belle-Rivière: 1840-2006*, 2 vols. (Montreal, Société d'histoire du protestantisme franco-québécois, 2007); Vogt-Raguy, *Les communautés*, passim.

denominations such as the Presbyterians, Anglicans, Methodists, and some Congregationalists. The FCMS had cordial relations with the Grande Ligne mission and both tried generally to concentrate on different areas of the province. However, the French Canadian Missionary Society would benefit from closer financial ties not only to North American donors, but also Scottish, English, French, and Swiss.²²

The stated goal of the society was to seek the conversion of French Canadians from what it perceived were the errors and backwardness of the Roman Catholic Church to the truth and liberty of the Protestant Gospel. If their founding documents are to be believed, the society was not only to be understood as a tool to cultivate the English language and particularly English values among the conquered French Canadians.²³ Rather, a focus on the theology, the belief (or lack thereof) was forefront. It is no wonder that significant articles focused on the errors of Roman Catholic theology and on the negative impact this had on French Canadian society were a major part of every annual report of the FCMS.

The FCMS began its work in and around the Northern half of Montreal, the mission decided on a first post in the area of Belle-Rivière, about 50 kilometres North of Montreal's centre.²⁴ Prior to the founding of the FCMS, several French Canadians there had noted their interest in the Bible and the evangelical faith, so it seemed most promising to start in this area.²⁵ The missionaries began the work of evangelization in the region around Belle-Rivière, and, soon, the education of children who had no opportunity to go to school.

One of the most pressing needs was the presence of an ordained minister to perform the various official pastoral duties. The committee naturally wrote to Geneva and was answered in the person of Jean-Emmanuel Tanner. Tanner, born in the Canton de Vaud, had studied under the leading figures of the Réveil in the late 1830s²⁶ and was pastor for several years in France before coming to Canada with his wife in August 1841. Tanner's arrival was welcomed by the other workers for, as the only one who could lawfully celebrate the sacraments, it made him a natural focal point of the group.²⁷

The education work of the Society was increasingly productive and it was soon decided to invest significant time and money into a school complex. After studying the region around Montreal, it was decided to buy a parcel of land on the east end of the Island of Montreal in the Pointe-aux-Trembles. Although the Institute would be taken over by the Presbyterians as the French Canadian

²² For a list of the first members and the auxiliary committees in Europe see: *First and Second Annual Report of the FCMS* (Montreal, Campbell and Becket, 1841), pp. 11ff.

²³ See Glen Scorgie's comments: "The French Canadian Missionary Society," p. 67.

²⁴ One of the most well-known colporteurs of these first years was Joseph Vessot. His diary can be found in David-Thierry Ruddel, *Le protestantisme français au Québec, 1840-1919: « Images » et témoignages*. Collection Mercure histoire, No. 36 (Ottawa: Musée national de l'homme, 1983), pp. 15-43. See also the forthcoming monograph by Jean-Louis Lalonde and Pierre Grosjean, *Joseph Vessot: colporteur de bibles et pasteur presbytérien au Québec (1810-1898)*.

²⁵ Lalonde, *Belle-Rivière*, vol.1, p. 31.

²⁶ Tanner probably studied under Merle D'Aubigné at the Faculté de théologie de Genève (l'Oratoire). See the biography in Lalonde, *Belle-Rivière*, vol. 2. See also L. Maury, *Le Réveil religieux dans l'Église Réformée à Genève et en France, 1810-1850*, vol. 1 (Paris, Fischbacher, 1892), p. 334.

²⁷ Lalonde, *Belle-Rivière*, vol. 2, p. 596.

Missionary Society's work became more attached to its various denominations, it was for the time the central hub of its activities, no doubt, again, because of the presence of Rev. Tanner. Indeed, the 1860 annual report notes that the Pointe-aux-Trembles station had become its most important the centre of the Mission.²⁸

Although it would last until 1880, the French Canadian Missionary Society began to see its base erode by an increasing denominationalism among its members and workers. Besides the Grande Ligne mission which had already generally affiliated itself to the Canadian and American Baptists, the Presbyterians began their own missionary society in 1841, the Anglicans in 1848, and the Methodists in 1854.²⁹ Again, there were generally cordial relations between the members of these societies, and many workers were actually in the employ of more than one in their careers. However, due to the realities of mission geography and financing there was also some concurrence.³⁰

III. Jules Bourgoin

We now have the beginnings of a background to understand the dynamics of Bourgoin's coming. Born in Glay, France in 1848, Bourgoin was at an early age influenced by the theology and work of the leaders of the Francophone *Réveil*. In fact, Glay was home to a small but significant evangelical Bible school. Founded by Henri Jaquet (who learned the *Réveil* theology in his native Switzerland) in the 1820s, this school educated hundreds of evangelists and colporteurs of Bibles during his lifetime.³¹ Bourgoin eventually joined their numbers, graduating from the school in 1868. Although he was mechanically inclined as a child, he was also quite interested in grammar and history and graduated from Glay with a specialization as a teacher.³²

It was at this school that Bourgoin became acquainted with the work of the French Canadian Missionary Society. In 1868, Jean-Antoine Vernon, also native of France, but an FCMS worker since 1854, had visited the Glay *Institut* to promote French Canadian work. No one, it seems, would have guessed Bourgoin would have taken such interest in this work, but he soon announced that he was ready to take up the challenge in Canada.³³ Reflecting on his motivation almost 20 years later, Bourgoin noted that it seemed to him at the time that he saw great honour to work

²⁸ *Twenty-First Annual Report of the FCMS*, 1860, p. 5.

²⁹ Lalonde, *Des loups*, p. 117.

³⁰ Vogt-Raguy, "Les communautés protestantes", pp. 266ff. See also, Richard E. Strout, "The Latter Years of the Board of French Evangelization of the Presbyterian Church in Canada: 1895-1912," (M.A. thesis, Bishop's University, 1986), pp. 3-4.

³¹ See Ch. Henri Mathiot, *Henri Jaquet, fondateur de l'institut Glay (1788-1867)* (Montbéliard, Sté anonyme d'Imprimerie montbéliardaise, 1909); Jean-Louis Lalonde, "Les missionnaires québécois et l'Institut de Glay," *Bulletin d'Histoire de la Société du Protestantisme Franco-Québécois* 19 (2008), pp. 3-8; Jean-Marc Debard, "Jaquet, Henri," in *Les Protestants: dictionnaire du monde religieux dans la France contemporaine*. ed. André Encrevé (Paris, Beauchesne, 1993), pp. 262-63.

³² See Duclos, vol. 1, p. 300.

³³ Duclos, vol. 1, p. 301.

in this “young France who seemed to be more ready to receive the Gospel than her mother.”³⁴

Arriving later that year in Montreal, Bourgoin explored his options for work with the Society. Early on he visited the Pointe-aux-Trembles mission school, and was drawn to it. Duclos recalls that Bourgoin remarked that at this point: “I wanted to stay; I was a teacher. The children, the school, and the curriculum were appealing.”³⁵ However, before teaching at the school, Bourgoin gained more first-hand experience in the difficulty of the work.

With Jean-Baptiste Muraire, another missionary with whom he had come from France, Bourgoin was sent by the FCMS to work in Quebec City.³⁶ Besides “cold, snow, and storm” and “lots of warlking”, Bourgoin would endure the scorn and persecution of his neighbours. One particular incident shaped his opinion of the difficulty of the work for years to come.³⁷ One day while crossing the Plains of Abraham, a small group of men threatened him with knives and threw rocks at him. It is not entirely clear what their motivation was, but it seems clear enough that it was for religious reasons. Several of the rocks found their mark. Even though he passed out from several shocks to the head, he had a good enough look at his attackers and could remember their faces after he regained consciousness. Walking home with blood in his hair and on his clothes and needing medical attention, he happened to meet one of the perpetrators. He confronted him, grabbing him by the collar. However, he let go, telling himself that it was not for him to take justice in this situation. The attack did not discourage Bourgoin, but only heightened his desire to work among this people.³⁸

The work continued in Quebec City, but Bourgoin was soon called back to teach in several FCMS supported schools including that of East Templeton (near Ottawa) and the Point-aux-Trembles school. After a rather difficult time in Quebec City, this work was quite a bit more pleasant. In his 1873 FCMS Annual Report, Charles-A. Tanner noted Bourgoin’s commitment to the work of the school: “Mr. Bourgoin, besides his ordinary duties in the school, has made himself very useful in understanding the superintendence of the Sabbath school and the conducting of the Sabbath evening service; which duties he discharges in the most acceptable

³⁴ Jules Bourgoin to the Presbyterian of Montreal, 4 October 1887 [Archives nationales P614]. This letter is written English. It is not certain where Bourgoin learned English, but he seems to be relatively proficient in the language in his written correspondence with the leaders of the FCMS and the faculty of the Presbyterian College.

³⁵ Duclos, Vol 1, p. 301.

³⁶ The annual report of the FCMS says almost nothing about this period or these incidents. Seemingly the only thing the Annual Report has to say of Bourgoin’s activities in Quebec are about his leaving: “J. Bourgoin, Quebec, labored with Mr. Muraire till his removal to Montreal in May.” 32nd Annual Report, 1871, p. 6.

³⁷ See Duclos, vol. 1, p. 302.

³⁸ In 1887, Bourgoin wrote: “I had been engaged only a few months in the world when I was attacked by some of our persecutors with stones and knives and left for dead on the spot. This trial did not discourage me but it was like a new manifestation of the importance of the work in which I was engaged.” Jules Bourgoin to the Presbyterian of Montreal, 4 October 1887 [Archives nationales P614].

manner.”³⁹ The year following Tanner reiterates this point by saying that he was “ably assisted” by Bourgoin.⁴⁰ Bourgoin seemed to have found a place where he could prosper.

Apart from his service to the school, a source of happiness was his courtship of and marriage to Miss Léa Rondeau in 1873. Léa came from a staunchly Protestant family who had been involved in French evangelization for more than 20 years. The FCMS Annual Report makes her dedication to the work quite plain. In the 1873 report it states that on the resignation of a previous assistant in the girl’s school:

The Committee offered the position of assistant teacher to Mdlle. Léa Rondeau, daughter of Mr. Norbert Rondeau, of Ste. Elizabeth, and a former pupil of Pointe aux Trembles. She has cheerfully resigned the comforts of a happy home, to take her part in the regeneration of her country-women.⁴¹

Léa’s parents, Norbert Rondeau and Annette (née Vernier) of Ste-Elizabeth (near Joliette, North-East of Montreal) were both close supporters of the mission schools and had corresponded with Bourgoin about his work and his missionary vision in the years previous.⁴² However, in the summer of 1873 the romance blossomed. Jules and Léa began to correspond with each other on a very regular basis. The content of the letters became so serious that Jules developed a simple coded language so that only she could read his letters. It seems that he replaced each letter of the alphabet with a symbol for which only Léa had the proper key to decode. By the end of the summer, Jules, no longer able to keep his love in code alone, wrote to Norbert and Annette asking for Léa’s hand in marriage. Knowing that they would lose a daughter and gain a son, Norbert and Annette wrote Jules that his letter “touched their hearts” and agreed to his request knowing that he was the right man for their daughter.⁴³ The two were married in the fall of 1873.

All was not stable in young married life. It was still not clear where Bourgoin would have a permanent position until 1875. In fact, it would take the death of the recently installed director of the Pointe-aux-Trembles mission school, Mr. Des Ilets, for a position to open in which Bourgoin could stay and grow. In the year previous to the 1875 report, C.A. Tanner had resigned to help deal with his wife’s illness. Des Ilets, who had been on leave from the school, following a ‘severe illness’ in the session of 1870-71, came back to direct the school for a time in late 1874, but suffered a relapse in illness in 1875, passing away in May. In extending to him the offer of director, the school’s board saw Bourgoin’s youth, but also his abilities: “He is a young man who, both from experience and ability, is well qualified for the responsible position.”⁴⁴ Bourgoin readily accepted the post and remained in it until

³⁹ FCMS Annual Report, 1873, p. 11.

⁴⁰ FCMS Annual Report, 1874, p. 6.

⁴¹ FCMS Annual Report, 1873, p. 10.

⁴² One wonders if Jules already had his eye on Léa in 1872 and 1873. In any case, he sent letters to her parents about the mission work including with them a picture of his erstwhile teacher Henri Jaquet and his wife. Mrs. Rondeau sent Jules a letter on 15 Dec. 1872 thanking him for the picture and again on 15 April 1873 thanking him for a further update on his work. [Archives nationales P614].

⁴³ Norbert and Annette Rondeau to Jules Bourgoin, 9 September 1873 [Archives nationales P614].

⁴⁴ FCMS Annual Report, 1876, p. 11.

his own death in 1900. Although he did travel regularly to Montreal and visited his parents in France in 1879, Point-aux-Trembles was now his home. Under his tenure the school enjoyed a time of stability and educated a whole generation of students.

Bourgoin's contemporaries noted his passion and drive for the work in PAT. Duclos writes: "We could write volumes on the work he accomplished, his influence on others, the conversions of young men, the fatigue he endured, or the constant refurbishing of the buildings, but we must limit ourselves..."⁴⁵ Bourgoin seemed to have the experience necessary to teach students and lead the institution, but he also developed in his methods. For example, it seems that he was much more willing to use corporal punishment at the beginning of his mandate than later on. However, as he gained experience, he noted that students would stay on the right track more easily by loving them and giving them a lot of work. Corporal punishment wasn't necessary if students had no opportunities to waste their time (fr.: "meubler leur temps.")⁴⁶

Bourgoin's strategies in discipline reflected his attitudes about what this school was to be. For him it was a *mission*. In his report included in the FCMS annual report of 1878, Bourgoin noted succinctly his vision: "Our aim is to eradicate error and superstition from the minds of our pupils, and to lead them to the acceptance of Jesus as their only Saviour. The study of the Bible takes the first place in our subjects."⁴⁷ He was eager to have Protestant children at the institution, but also those having grown up in Catholic homes. Although not without challenge, he clearly pushed for conversions among the children. In 1879 he noted that fifteen boys and and girls, "have been hopefully converted to Jesus and continue to walk in the strait path among their ignorant and bigoted countrymen, fighting the good battle against error and superstition, often persecuted even by their own parents who do not share their religious opinions."⁴⁸

This mission vision was seen in the goals of the institution under Bourgoin. It was not simply a school for 'perfect' children. Hence, he was much more prepared to channel the children's weaknesses towards better things. The understanding he and his wife had of the mission was graphically played out in a response to a letter from her aunt. In December 1890, Elisa Holiday, Léa's aunt, wrote Jules with some alarming news. In Rawdon the rumor was circulating that all sorts of bad things were happening at the *Institut*. One rumor was that a girl had stayed out late with a group of partying boys. Another was even more scandalous: "It has also been said that many boys commit horrible sins between themselves, and that they enjoy teaching these sins to others. For example, the sin of sodomy."⁴⁹ These rumors have meant that some no longer want to send their sons to the school. Aunt Elisa gives the advice that Jules should find a trustworthy boy to work as a spy for him to identify the naughty boys and punish them.

⁴⁵ Duclos, vol. 1, p. 304

⁴⁶ Duclos, vol. 1, p. 305.

⁴⁷ FCMS Annual Report, 1878, p. 13.

⁴⁸ FCMS Annual Report, 1879, p. 16.

⁴⁹ Elisa Holiday to Jules Bourgoin, 4 Dec. 1890.

Léa Bourgoïn responds to her aunt's letter for Jules. She acknowledges that it is difficult to raise a family and teach children in this context, but that "wagging tongues" make her work ten times more difficult. It is true that the students are often "poorly raised, ignorant and often mean-tempered" but that "if it was otherwise and if our students were saints we would close this school and go to work among the sinners elsewhere."⁵⁰ What the school needs, says Léa, is not discouragement, but support (and maybe even a few dollars?!). She concludes by saying: "I do not like the winds that blow down from Joliette and Rawdon for they don't bode well. I wait for them to become softer and better for my health..." The discipline of the children needs to be understood within the overall mission of the school.

Nasty rumours may have spread, but the school's reputation did not suffer too badly. Under Bourgoïn's tenure the school received record numbers of applicants. It was not uncommon to receive up to 300 applications for only a few more than 100 available spaces. Bourgoïn would have loved that Pointe-aux-Trembles could accommodate more students, but there were limited resources. Nonetheless, Bourgoïn oversaw significant reparation and building projects under his tenure.⁵¹ When the FCMS sold the building to the Board of French Evangelization of the Presbyterian Church in Canada in 1880, Bourgoïn continued to oversee improvements. Indeed, like with the FCMS, in the first years under the Presbyterians it was noted that Bourgoïn was "admirably adapted" and "admirably qualified" for his work as administrator and director. In 1883, the Presbyterian Annual Report noted that, "His experience of twelve years in connection with the schools, his high Christian character, and his success as a disciplinarian and a teacher render him most invaluable to the work."⁵²

Although the religious mission of the school was clear, it was not always easy to have official ministers of the Gospel to work with the children. Jules had thought about studying for the pastoral ministry under French theology professor Daniel Coussirat at the Presbyterian College when he first arrived in Canada, but became so involved in the work that he did not get around to it. However, by the mid-1880s he saw this more acutely as a need. In the spring of 1887 he wrote to Presbyterian College principal Donald Harvey MacVicar to inquire about the steps he needed to take. He argued ordination he could take on more pastoral duties, have more influence when presenting the work at PAT to potential donors, and teach the Bible courses with more authority.⁵³ MacVicar soon responded by saying that seeing as Bourgoïn was already deeply engaged in mission work for almost a generation it would be possible for him to work out a program of study that would not require him to quit his post.

⁵⁰ Léa Bourgoïn to Elisa Holiday (ND).

⁵¹ These are often mentioned in the FCMS Annual Reports and the subsequent Annual Reports of the Board of French Evangelization of the Presbyterian Church in Canada.

⁵² Annual Report Board of French Evangelization of the Presbyterian Church, 1883, p. 7.

⁵³ Jules Bourgoïn to Donald Harvey MacVicar (Spring 1887?).

Over the next two years, Bourgoïn devoted as much time as his busy schedule would allow to study books and to take periodical exams that culminated in his graduation on 5 April 1889. His reading and exams covered history, exegesis, apologetics, homiletics, polemics, and the languages of Latin, Greek, and Hebrew.⁵⁴ Most of the books were by well-known French language Protestant writers of the 19th century. His final grades were very good in theology and history and rather poor in the languages.⁵⁵ However, these grades were acceptable since, as Coussirat explained, he was being tested on the 'basic notions' of these languages.⁵⁶

Bourgoïn was ordained on 9 November 1889 at 11 a.m. Dr. Coussirat led the ordination ceremony, with a sermon by A.B. Cruchet and an exhortation by Dr. Scrimger.⁵⁷ At the ceremony Bourgoïn reflected on why he came to love his work: "This is why I love Pointe-aux-Trembles...the mission school is a light that will remain in the annals of French Protestant history in Canada. In time our walls might fall down and plowed over, but our work and our influence will not be destroyed. Among the older ones of its large family, there will be more than one historian to perpetuate its memory..."⁵⁸

Even with an ordained director, the work of the *Institut* carried on per normal. Besides the work of teaching, Bourgoïn continued to welcome new students and promote the work of the school to a broader constituency. He was rewarded with salary increases on a periodic basis.⁵⁹ He also had to deal with the range of issues from cooking to plumbing.⁶⁰ It was in large part due to Bourgoïn's energy and initiative that the *Institut* was an "école sanitaire."⁶¹

Nearing the end of the 1890s, Bourgoïn began to feel the effects of a quarter-century of hard labour. The Spring of 1900 was particularly difficult. The students knew that his health was failing before they left for the summer holidays, but they never saw him again. On 10 September he died. Quite incredibly his father, who had come from France to live near Jules and Léa in Canada, died the following day. Duclos writes, "the two caskets, both son and father, that were on display in the college chapel offered a striking spectacle. Even the Catholics, ordinarily so ferocious when it came to Protestants, were won over by the goodness of Jules Bourgoïn. A good number of them paid their respects before his casket as a sign of

⁵⁴ Jules Bourgoïn to MacVicar, 7 March 1889.

⁵⁵ Calvin's *Institutes* - 90, Philosophy - 75, History - 82, Dogmatics - 75, Exegesis - 60, Polemics - 79, Theology - 78, Apologetics - 45, Latin - 50, Greek - 41, Hebrew - 35, Homiletics - 60. In D. Coussirat to J. Bourgoïn, 29 March 1889.

⁵⁶ D. Coussirat to J. Bourgoïn, 10 June 1889.

⁵⁷ The 'Edit de consécration' listing these details was published by the presbytery on 19 October 1889, signed James Patterson.

⁵⁸ As cited in Duclos, vol. 1, p. 307.

⁵⁹ See, for example, R.H. Warden to J. Bourgoïn, 23 September 1881.

⁶⁰ On 27 July 1881, Jules wrote to R.H. Warden about news of dissatisfaction at the school. If there is any truth to it, he surmised, it was probably the cooking in the girl's school. Further, in 1888 he was encouraged by Warden to order the newly-available invention of toilet paper for the closets (ie. washrooms) of the school. Warden boasted that they already had toilet paper for two years at the college and it had significantly reduced the bills for plumbing.

⁶¹ Duclos, vol. 1, p. 308.

thanks.”⁶² Daniel Coussirat said this of Bourgoïn at the funeral: “Let us remember that the source of his generous life was his faith in God’s grace, without any of his own merit.”⁶³ Coussirat’s words are a fitting testimony for a man who was so motivated by his sense of mission.

IV. Conclusion

Besides the many interesting contours of the history of the FCMS and of the life of Jules Bourgoïn, we note in conclusion one key issue that our stories have evoked. We see in both the context in which Bourgoïn began his work and the work of his life that French-speaking Protestantism in Canada had a complicated relationship to the denominations involved in its growth. Although both major mission societies, the Grand Ligne mission and the French Canadian Missionary Society, purported to be independent and non-sectarian, there was never a unification of denominational work, strictly speaking. Two distinct, but related effects occurred as the mission work developed. On the one hand, because of the non-denominational and international roots of the mission work many French Protestants played down the theological divisions between the various Protestant groups, preaching a sort of pan-evangelical theology. This theology was agreed upon in its broad strokes with an emphasis on the importance of active evangelization. Hence, the groups could work together for the cause of French evangelism without getting weighed down by distinctives of church polity or confessional theology from the beginning. There is little indication in the 19th century sources that participants wanted to return to what was perceived as any sort of theological hair-splitting of the 17th or 18th centuries. Rather, many minimized or even ridiculed these distinctives—making some see them as a major stumbling block to further ministry.⁶⁴

Yet, on the other hand, even though the tendency was to push for a non-sectarian spirit among the French Canadian workers, all the workers ended up affiliating with an established English denomination by the end of the century. This is not to say that there was a total repudiation of other denominations, but, rather, denominational affiliation became all-the-more important for practical and monetary reasons even though there was a general tendency to play it down. For example, the FCMS wanted to stimulate the organization of Churches, but these needed pastors who were lawfully ordained and could celebrate the sacraments. These men would have to have an affiliation with some group.⁶⁵ It was on this

⁶² Duclos, vol. 1, p. 313.

⁶³ As cited in Duclos, vol. 1, p. 312.

⁶⁴ I have explored this tendency in relation to the Presbyterian affiliation of Charles Chiniqy: “Charles Chiniqy: The Meta-denominational and *protestant* Presbyterian” *Westminster Theological Journal* (2010), pp. 103-17.

⁶⁵ See, for example, the decision taken by the FCMS reported in its nineteenth annual report: “The decision taken by the Committee not to interfere with the organization of French Canadian Churches but to leave them entirely free to adopt whatever ecclesiastical constitution they might agree upon, making it the only condition of continued support that nothing in their principles will conflict with

practical level that theologically secondary items, like infant baptism, liturgy, or theological education became dividing factors.

the profession of faith contained in the fundamental articles of the Society, has met with the cordial assent of the converts." (1858), 27.