

bedeviled the United States whose system of government “could not present an executive head who would command respect.” Under the Confederation to which Cartier looked forward, the Queen’s ministers “might be abused and assailed,” but such abuse would never reach the Sovereign and, consequently, Canadian institutions would enjoy a prestige unknown in the United States.¹⁴ In contrast to Cartier’s sophisticated political science, John Rose flatly asserted the difference between Canadians and Americans to be quite simply that the “genius and instincts of our people are monarchical and conservative--theirs levelling and democratic.”¹⁵

Religion presents an interesting contrast between then and now when one ponders the profoundly secular character of contemporary Quebec society--both separatist and federalist--against the background of the 1860s. In making the comparison, one cannot help asking, “Whatever happened to the Catholic Church?” The short answer can probably be traced back over several decades of unwise alliances on the part of the Catholic clergy with political leaders who were less than models of progressive thinking. Whatever the reason, the contrast is stark.

Religion was a major factor in the Confederation Debates. Today one speaks of the need for some sort of protection for the language, law, and culture of Quebecers, but in 1865 precious little was said about “culture.” Religion, language, and law were always mentioned in the same breath and together formed the great threefold object of concern for the French surnamed delegates from Lower Canada regardless of whether they supported confederation or opposed it.¹⁶ These delegates were primarily concerned about a provision in the Quebec resolutions giving the federal government control over “marriage and divorce.” Catholic Confederationists like H.L. Langevin assured their coreligionists that there was no need for concern, but for Félix Geoffrion, an opponent of confederation, this clause presented a question of conscience. Reminding the Legislative Assembly that Sir Etienne Pascal Taché, a staunch confederationist, had stated before the Legislative Council (the upper house of the unified Province of Canada) just a few months earlier