



From the Archives

May 6, 2026

Excerpts on CECM History

Below are excerpts from a review of a book by historian Robert Gagnon on the history of the CECM. The excerpts are taken out of context yet reveal insights as to how the Catholic Church gained sway over education, what its priorities were, and how the English Sector of the CECM emerged. I particularly found the impact of the Rebellion of 1837 interesting, as the influence of the French-Canadian professional class [which was fighting for democracy] was supplanted by the Catholic Church.

The book review does emphasize immigration and how, after WWII, the CECM welcomed Catholic immigrants, "... but without a policy to integrate them into the French stream". The review, however, does not directly mention that the immigrants were directed to the English stream (Sector, as of 1964) – (maybe Gagnon's book does elaborate, avoids the issue, or camouflages it - more research?). The tone of the review nevertheless indicates that religion was more important than language.

Please remember that these are excerpts from the book review and best understood in the context of the review itself – Note: the link does not work directly – it should be copied and pasted into the Address Bar on your computer - the input field located at the top of your browser.

<http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showpdf.php?id=2815>

Jerry Dunn

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Robert Gagnon. *Histoire de la commission des écoles catholiques de Montreal.*

Montreal: Boreal, 1996. Reviewed by Mary Jane Losier Published on H-Canada (February 1999) vii + 400 pp. \$22.95, paper, ISBN 978-2-89052-751-5.

Managing the Schools: A History of Montreal's Catholic School Board

[Excerpts]

The Francophone elites, who spawned most of the leaders in the conflict [1837 Rebellion] were more or less ostracized from positions of influence. The Catholic Church, already an omnipotent force in Quebec society, moved to fill the void left by the intelligentsia, and cemented their power by taking control of social programs, education and health care. The Ultramontane Bishop Bourget supported the concept of public education, particularly for Catholic children, but one tightly controlled by the church. Page 2

The CECM acted well within the perimeters of its mandate by opposing structural changes and more liberal attitudes, and its decisions reflected the opinions of the majority of Francophones. Page 4

For the first fifty years of its existence, the author noted, the board managed classes where English and French speaking students learned the two languages without creating any great debates. French and English language instruction were given equal importance in these early decades of the CECM's history. ... In 1894 this concept was dropped. Students were separated into French and English classes in the thirty-nine schools with sizable English/French populations. Gagnon writes that with the marginalization of Anglophone students, came the decline of second language teaching to Francophone students. Page 5

Anglophone Catholics, making up only 15% of the CECM school population in the west end of Montreal in 1909, but less than 5% elsewhere in the city, lobbied unsuccessfully for a separate school district within the perimeters of the CECM as early as 1910. Although they failed to have a separate district, the parents did succeed in having complete autonomy over instruction in English Catholic schools, and English classes within Francophone schools in 1928. Page 5

Gagnon correctly asserts, it was more concerned with saving souls for the church. Thus it set up programs that would attract Catholic immigrants, from Eastern Europe

particularly, into the Catholic system, but without a policy to integrate them into the French stream. Page 5

The priority of the official Church was to preserve the church and its structures from reactionary ideas coming from Eastern Block countries after WW II. Canadianizing immigrants, reinforcing Catholic theology, and introducing English Catholic culture were the objectives. In that regard, the CECM was merely a tool, not an agent, and should not be faulted for acting within the perimeters set by the church itself. Page 6

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