

FRENCH ARCHITECTS IN EARLY TWENTIETH-CENTURY FRENCH-CANADIAN CHURCH ARCHITECTURE: the Contribution of Breton Architect Arthur Regnault in Nova Scotia (Acadia) and Québec City¹

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FIG. 1. PIERRE-MARIE DAGNAUD, 1858-1930. | EUDIST FATHERS ARCHIVES, CHARLESBOURG, QUÉBEC.

During a number of trips to Brittany, I have had the opportunity to visit churches built to plans by Arthur Regnault in Ille-et-Vilaine. I had already come across the name of this architect from Rennes in Canada while researching religious architecture, first in Québec City and later in the Maritime Provinces. Further research led me to attribute authorship of two major buildings to him: Sainte-Marie's Church in Pointe-de-l'Église, located in the Acadian part of Nova Scotia, built in 1903, and Saint-Cœur-de-Marie's Church in Québec City, dating back to 1918.² Through my research I was also able to trace Regnault's contribution to two other Canadian buildings: the chapel of the Holy Heart Seminary in Halifax, Nova Scotia (1905), and the chapel of the Collège de Caraquet in New Brunswick (1907). Unfortunately, neither of these buildings stands today.³

PIERRE-MARIE DAGNAUD, A EUDIST PRIEST AND GO-BETWEEN FOR REGNAULT'S ARCHITECTURAL WORK IN CANADA

Regnault's contribution to the French-Canadian built landscape stems from the personal mediation of Father Pierre-Marie Dagnaud, a central figure among the Breton members of the Société des prêtres de Jésus et de Marie—commonly referred to as the Eudists after their founder Jean Eudes—who, fleeing the persecutions of the Republic, as they liked to say, arrived in Canada in 1890.

Pierre-Marie Dagnaud (1858-1930) (fig. 1) was born in Bains-sur-Oust (Ille-et-Vilaine,

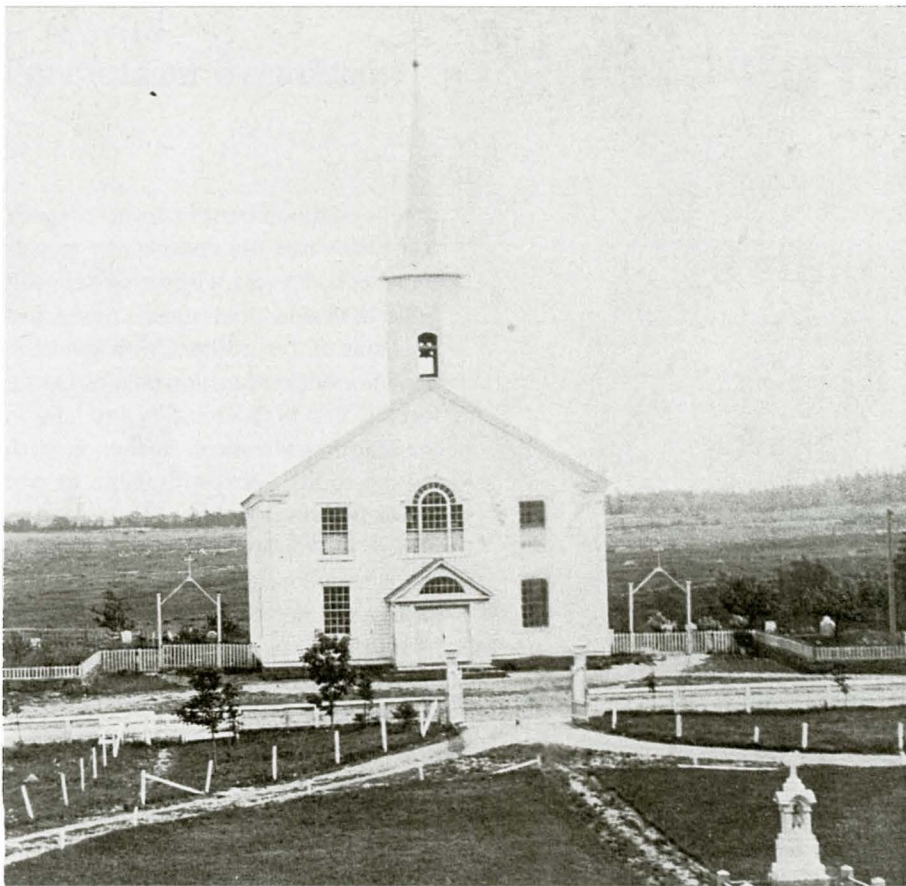


FIG. 2. FATHER SIGOGNE'S "GREAT CHURCH," POINTE-DE-L'ÉGLISE, ERECTED 1820-1829, DEMOLISHED IN 1905. | CENTRE ACADIEN, UNIVERSITÉ SAINTE-ANNE, NOVA SCOTIA

Brittany) in a modest working-class family. In 1874, he was recruited by the Eudists who had opened a seminary and an apostolic school in the former manor house of La Roche-du-Teil.⁴ This is where, in 1876, he met Father Ernest Regnault (1841-1923), who was a lecturer in philosophy at the novitiate. Ernest Regnault, brother of architect Arthur Regnault, progressed very rapidly in the Eudist hierarchy; he founded the Collège Saint-Jean-de-Béthune in Versailles in 1878 and became the general assistant of his congregation in 1899. It is he who that same year, as we shall see below, sent Father Dagnaud to Canada, more precisely to Pointe-de-l'Église (Nova Scotia), to head the Collège Sainte-Anne and be the pastor of the Sainte-Marie parish. The

architect's relationship with the Eudists was further strengthened in 1902, when his son Étienne Regnault (1882-1947)—nephew of Father Ernest—came to Canada to complete his education at the Eudist seminary in Halifax, where he was ordained priest on June 17, 1905; Étienne collaborated with Dagnaud until 1910.

Dagnaud was about to be appointed superior at the Collège de Redon in 1899, when his congregation decided to grant him the title of vicar provincial of Canada and gave him as well pastoral and academic responsibilities in Pointe-de-l'Église. He arrived in the midst of a construction site: the Collège Sainte-Anne, which had been built in 1891 but had burned down in January 1899, was undergoing

reconstruction. One of Father Dagnaud's first tasks was to ensure completion of the Collège Sainte-Anne's chapel in 1901.⁵ Then in 1902, the Eudist ordered the construction of a filial church for his parish in a place called "les Concessions," which later became the Notre-Dame-du-Mont-Carmel parish. This modest structure was built by Léo Melanson, a contractor from La Pointe, who drew inspiration from the local tradition of religious architecture with a neo-Gothic bent. Finally, in 1903, Dagnaud launched work on the new Sainte-Marie's Church, which was of such considerable dimensions that he himself did not hesitate to call it a "cathedral" or a "basilica." The construction was completed two years later.

SAINTE-MARIE'S CHURCH IN POINTE-DE-L'ÉGLISE (CHURCH POINT)

Father Dagnaud wanted a new parish church despite the reluctance of his Eudist colleagues, who judged that the enterprise exceeded the means available to the parish and the congregation. Nothing would make the new pastor back down however. He was driven by a strong desire to make a point and to reaffirm the French presence in Acadia. In addition to introducing French language instruction in the Collège, he helped reinstate the toponym Pointe-de-l'Église, which tended to be replaced by Church Point during the nineteenth century. Early on, he also declared his intention to replace the existing church at all costs, despite opposition from parishioners who, true to their Acadian heritage, venerated the building. They regarded the "Great Church," built in 1829 by Father Jean-Mandé Sigogne, the first missionary in the area, as a true relic (fig. 2). But for Dagnaud, a herald of francophone Catholicism, this church was not only too modest, it also replicated the shape of the Saint Paul Anglican

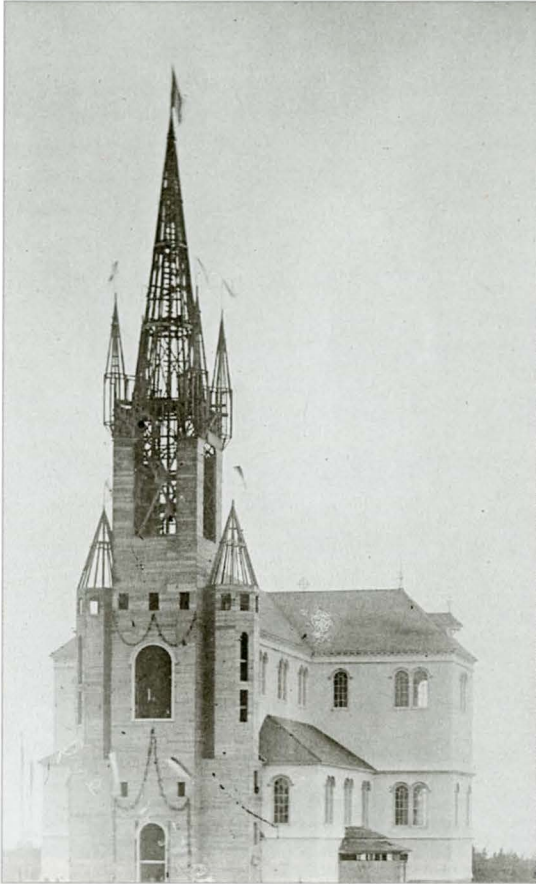


FIG. 3. SAINTE-MARIE'S CHURCH, POINTE-DE-L'ÉGLISE, UNDER CONSTRUCTION, 1904. | EUDIST FATHERS ARCHIVES, CHARLESBOURG, QUÉBEC.

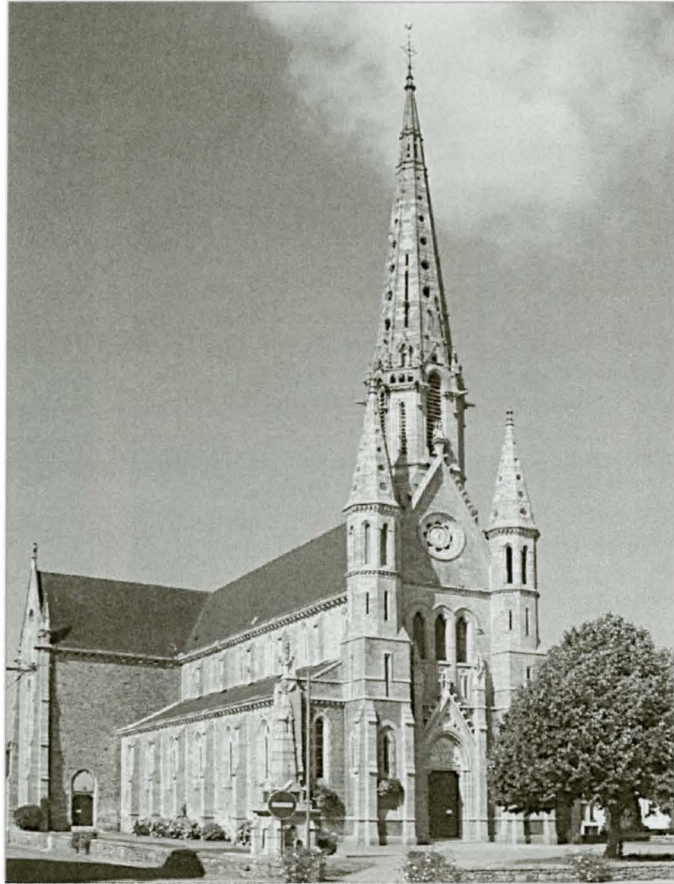


FIG. 4. SAINT-JEAN'S CHURCH, BAINS-SUR-OUST, BUILT 1854-1884, ARCHITECT JACQUES MELLET; WESTWORK BY ARCHITECT HENRI MELLET. | LUC NOPPEN

Church in Halifax. In his eyes—skilled in decoding the architectural symbolism of built landscapes—the presence of such an ostensibly “Protestant” monument in Pointe-de-l'Église was simply unbearable.

To achieve his goal, the Breton priest followed a phased approach. First, he chose to solicit architect Arthur Regnault to draw up plans corresponding to his expectations. This must have allayed the fears of his metropolitan superior and brother of the said architect, Father Ernest Regnault. He then submitted the plans to Reverend Cornelius O'Brien, Archbishop of Halifax. Moved by the majesty of this project for a large stone church, the archbishop agreed, without paying much heed to the means or the

needs of the parish and the congregation. His oversight would cause a rumpus that did not go unnoticed when, at the foundation stone-laying ceremony, he discovered that the church under construction rather had a wooden structure.⁶ Once the archbishop's approval was secured, Father Dagnaud proceeded to “translate” the plans: the result of this endeavour was an imposing wooden structure, destined to bear interior and exterior finishes formally replicating the Breton model. To calm the criticism produced by the cost of the monumental project, Dagnaud was at last able to present the church as a genuinely Acadian creation. In fact, at the time of the construction, the name of architect Regnault was not even mentioned, the priest taking all the credit. To his nephew

he wrote: “You have no reason to be proud of your uncle . . . he has become a carpenter like his father and his head is full of beams of every size, of planks and shingles.”⁷ In the minds of the parishioners, for whom construction chores were commonplace, Léo Melanson, an illiterate local labourer but a skilful builder, was set as the “author”—not to say the architect—of Sainte-Marie's Church⁸ (fig. 3).

It was not until 1980 that archival research by Father Basile J. Babin revealed for the first time the name of the architect from Rennes.⁹ However, Father Babin misinterpreted a number of facts: he suggested that the Regnault and Dagnaud families were bound by friendship, that both lived in Bains-sur-Oust, and that the architect

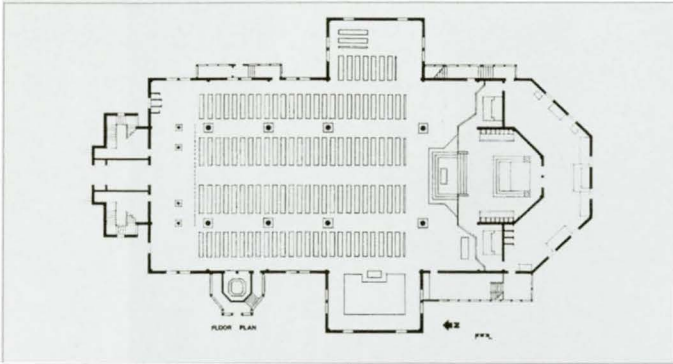


FIG. 5. SAINTE-MARIE'S CHURCH, POINTE-DE-L'ÉGLISE, GROUND PLAN. | FROM PACEY, ELISABETH, 1981, MORE STAELY MANSIONS – CHURCHES OF NOVA SCOTIA, 1830-1910, HANTSPORT (NS), LANCELOT PRESS, P. 167.

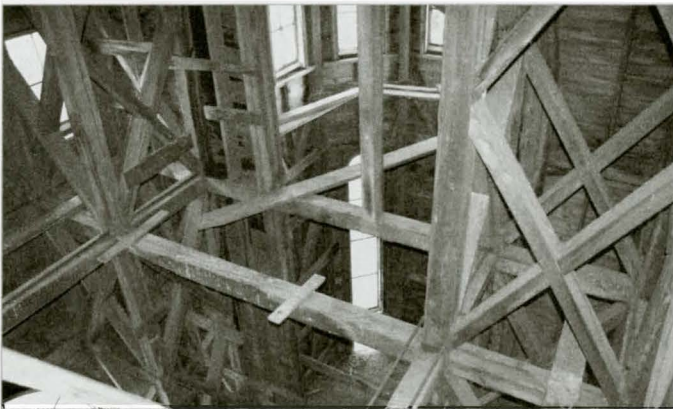


FIG. 7. SAINTE-MARIE'S CHURCH, POINTE-DE-L'ÉGLISE, STRUCTURE OF THE WESTWORK. | LUC NOPPEN



FIG. 6. SAINTE-MARIE'S CHURCH, POINTE-DE-L'ÉGLISE. | LUC NOPPEN

had sent the plans for his hometown church (fig. 4) to Father Dagnaud. In a parish monograph, Father Renaud Côté, informed of his *confrere's* discoveries, went further still:

When in 1903 Father Dagnaud decided on the construction of a new church for Sainte-Marie, he did not hesitate to ask Mr. Auguste Regneault [*sic*], an architect from Rennes, to draw up the plans, inspired from his hometown church.

But the church in Bains is built of stone. Mgr. O'Brien, then Archbishop of Halifax, would have liked Father Dagnaud to build it in stone but they had something else in mind in La Pointe. Wood was readily available; every true Acadian of Baie Sainte-Marie is

a carpenter by birth. Stone, on the other hand, would have been more costly in every respect and much less resistant to winter freeze and thaw.

It was the will of Providence, and no doubt of Sainte-Marie as well, that Léo Mélançon and Pierre-Marie Dagnaud would meet to form a peerless team, notwithstanding the difference in their respective levels of education. Father Dagnaud had taken courses in mathematics toward a university degree, whereas Léo had never set foot in a school. But the knowledge of calculus of the former was matched only by the natural woodworking skills of the latter. With the generous help of the parishioners, they succeeded in erecting the largest and tallest wooden monument in all of America.¹⁰

It has since come to be understood in Baie-Sainte-Marie that in our day and age, presenting Sainte-Marie's Church as the work of a local workman does not satisfy the curiosity of visitors, captivated by the majesty and uniqueness of this work. Thus it is said that the plans were designed by "a French architect, but they were unfeasible," and that the local genius saved the situation. Today, the brochure presenting the church only mentions that it was built from 1903 to 1905 with the help of 1500 local volunteers. But let us return to the facts.

Sainte-Marie's Church in Pointe-de-l'Église is built of wood to a Latin cross plan crowned by a three-sided apse (fig. 5). It is 57 metres long; its nave is



FIG. 8. SAINTE-MARIE'S CHURCH, POINTE-DE-L'ÉGLISE, OVERVIEW OF THE NAVE. | LUC NOPPEN

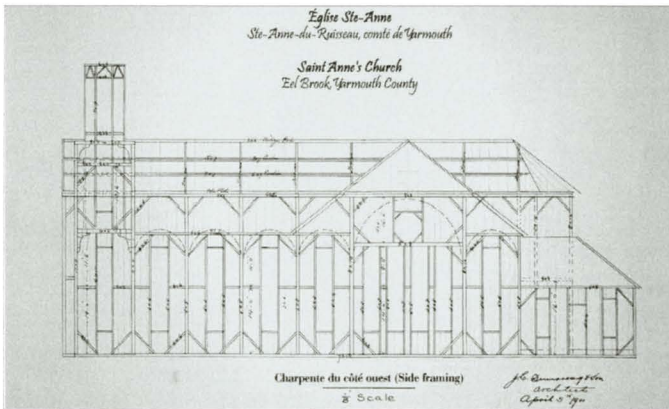


FIG. 10. SAINTE-ANNE'S CHURCH, SAINTE-ANNE-DU-RUISSEAU. PLAN OF THE WEST SIDE STRUCTURE, J.C. DUMARESQ & SON. COPY OF ORIGINAL PLAN, DISPLAYED IN THE CHURCH. | LUC NOPPEN



FIG. 8. SAINTE-MARIE'S CHURCH, POINTE-DE-L'ÉGLISE, WESTWORK. | LUC NOPPEN

25 metres wide and 41 metres in the transepts; the false vault rises 19.15 metres high.¹¹ The arrow of the church steeple reaches 56 metres. The new monument was instantly presented as "the largest wooden church in North America," a title it has kept to this day (figs. 6-7). A clarification is needed before going any further: until the beginning of the twentieth century, all churches in North America were built in the "English style," with a wooden structure fixed within stone- or brick-bearing walls; churches built entirely of wood were rarer and smaller, and were generally considered temporary. It is precisely around the year 1900 that a series of large wooden churches, like the one Father Dagnaud provided for Pointe-de-l'Église, started to proliferate

on the French-speaking coast of Nova Scotia; the fact that a number of these were destroyed by fire further highlights the preciousness of the Eudist monument.

Sainte-Marie's Church of Pointe-de-l'Église is nevertheless properly "French" owing to a set of structural and formal traits, both interior and exterior, which distinguish it from churches found in French Canada at the time. First of all, the nave illuminated by a clerestory and the gabled lower aisles on a lateral elevation evoke the French model; religious monuments of Catholic Canada had long ago abandoned this configuration given its costliness and the hard to heat naves.¹² This interior design is grandiose indeed: the high nave opens onto the lower aisles

through a row of semicircular arcades supported by columns and capitals, covered by a very pointed ogival false vault with rounded ribs (fig. 8). The three-storey elevation (large arcades, false triforium, and tall windows), like the false vault, evoke the late Romanesque architecture of a number of great eleventh- and twelfth-century monuments in Île-de-France.

The façade is striking with its imposing west-front where two stair turrets flank the high steeple surmounted by an elegant spire (fig. 9). The latter is delimited by four bartizans with arrow-slits, a fortification which was equally unknown in Canada until then. This set of structural elements and, above all, the emphasis placed on the picturesque silhouette, are quite typical



FIG. 11. SAINT-MARTIN'S CHURCH, VITRÉ, BUILT IN 1883 TO THE PLANS OF ARCHITECT HENRI MELLET, VIEW OF WESTWORK. | LUC NOPPEN



FIG. 12. SAINT-MARTIN'S CHURCH, VITRÉ, BUILT IN 1883 TO THE PLANS OF ARCHITECT HENRI MELLET, OVERVIEW OF INTERIOR. | CLAUDE QUILLVIC

of the revival of religious architecture in Brittany in the second half of the nineteenth century. They immediately point to the origins of the Acadian monument.

In fact, the main difference between the church in Pointe-de-l'Église and churches in France is that Canadian and Acadian builders always chose a wooden frame and a false vault. This substitution of material and type of structure clearly explains the number of variations that emerged in the process between the original plans and the church as it was built. Using wood allowed for a larger scope, a more spacious interior, and taller windows.

Such a structural transformation was found elsewhere in Nova Scotia as well.

For example, in 1900, in Sainte-Anne-du-Ruisseau, another of Baie-Sainte-Marie's parishes, the parish church was rebuilt under the leadership of Pastor Marie-Jules Crouzier, a priest from Nîmes. Like Dagnaud in La Pointe, he became the soul of the church reconstruction project.¹³ He spearheaded the building of a large wooden church, undeniably inspired by a nineteenth-century stone model from his native southern France. He entrusted this transposition to the architects J.C. Dumaresq and Son,¹⁴ whom he convened to draw up plans for a wooden structure, which have been preserved to this day (fig. 10). One can speculate that Sainte-Marie's Church too was so conceived and designed by a local architect, why not by the same Dumaresq who had

already produced the plans for the Eudist seminary in Halifax in 1894?

If we look back at the architectural design now ascribed to Arthur Regnault, the thesis, albeit attractive, that the plans for Sainte-Marie's Church were inspired by those of Bains-sur-Oust, Dagnaud's native parish, must be rejected as unfounded, in part because aside from a vague resemblance of the westwork, the two buildings are different in all respects. A more convincing model would be the Saint-Martin Church in Vitré¹⁵ (figs. 11-12): the ground plan, the façades, and interior elevations of the two churches do bear some resemblance. But neither the church in Bains, built between 1854 and 1884, nor that in Vitré, built in 1883, are



FIG. 13. SAINT-PIERRE'S CHURCH, CHÂTEAUBOURG, BY ARCHITECT ARTHUR REGNAULT, 1889-1902, BELL TOWER. | LUC NOPPEN



FIG. 14. CHAPEL OF THE HOLY HEART SEMINARY, HALIFAX, BUILT 1905-1906 TO THE PLANS OF ARCHITECT CHARLES W. WEST; ARTHUR REGNAULT, CONSULTING ARCHITECT. | EUDIST FATHERS ARCHIVES, CHARLESBOURG, QUÉBEC.

Arthur Regnault's handiwork; they are both creations of architects Jacques and Henri Mellet.¹⁶

Why would the architect from Rennes have sent plans designed by another architect? Let us suggest rather that he sent general plans for a church he conceived himself and which, in Dagnaud's eyes, had a vaguely familiar aspect (Bains) while being as large as Saint-Martin's Church, a building that marked Bretons' collective imagination at the time. The bell tower of Sainte-Marie's Church, inspired directly by that of Saint-Pierre's Church in Châteaubourg, built in 1889, is where Arthur Regnault left his own personal mark (fig. 13). The resemblance between Regnault's plans and those of the Mellets' churches can

be explained simply by the fact that all architects from Rennes followed Canon Joseph Brune's teachings. In his *Résumé du cours d'archéologie professé au séminaire de Rennes, suivi de notices historiques et descriptives sur les principaux monuments religieux du diocèse*, Brune depicts a number of churches which, "as a whole or due to their details, owing to their architecture or their decoration, are most worthy of attention."¹⁷ Dagnaud's taste in architecture had also been acquired at the same school.

WHY RESORT TO THE SERVICES OF A FRENCH ARCHITECT?

Like all religious exiles in Canada and the United States, Pierre-Marie Dagnaud

aspired to recreate conspicuously Catholic and French architecture on missionary land as a form of resistance to a world increasingly yielding to the temptation of secularism. This was even more pronounced in French-speaking Canada because the French clergy saw it as the promised land of French-speaking Catholicism, hence the need to fight the omnipresence in the built landscape (especially in the Maritime Provinces where English speakers prevailed) of the neo-Palladian and neo-Gothic architectural figures erected by the Anglican Church and Protestant sects. Therefore Dagnaud's and his architect's choice in favour of a large neo-Romanesque church reflected a desire to singularize the Catholic French monument.

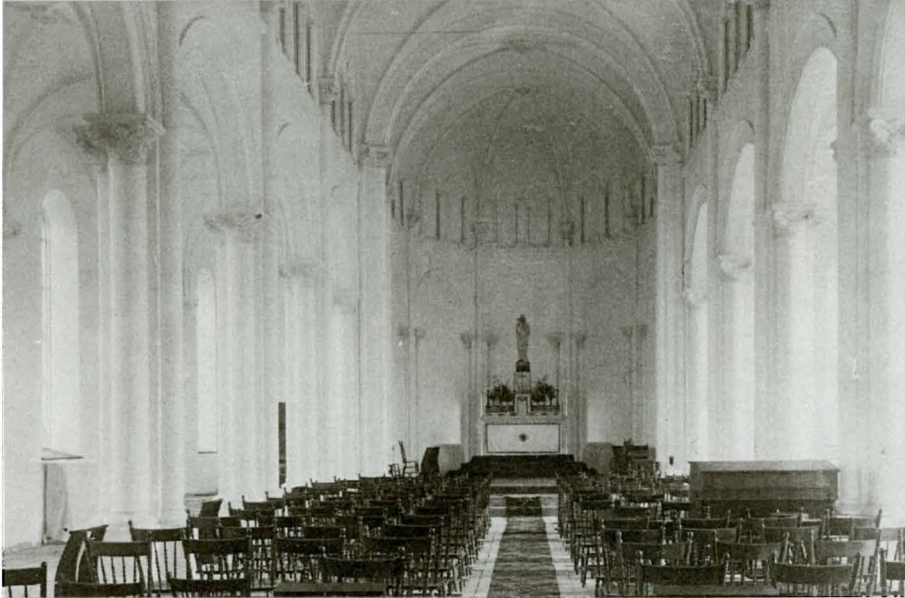


FIG. 15. CHAPEL OF THE SÉMINAIRE DE CARAQUET, CARAQUET, CONSTRUCTION DIRECTED BY FATHER JOSEPH COURTOIS, 1907-1910; ARTHUR REGNAULT, CONSULTING ARCHITECT. | EUDIST FATHERS ARCHIVES, CHARLESBOURG, QUÉBEC.

The choice of the architect from Rennes stemmed from a wish not to employ local architects—all English speakers and reputed to be “Protestants”—for the construction of a Catholic place of worship. Father Dagnaud’s reaching out to Arthur Regnault for support during the reconstruction of the new chapel of the Holy Heart Seminary in Halifax in 1905 is a case in point and very telling in this regard (fig. 14).¹⁸ A devout Catholic, the architect understood the North American context and provided arguments for the exiled Eudist. Regnault recognized that “the seminary was designed by an artist of great talent,” before going on to say that “Étienne [Regnault, my son] could not tell me if he was Catholic; he rather thinks he is Protestant. In this case, it will no doubt be difficult for him to fulfill his mission, to build a church designed to foster the piety of the faithful.”¹⁹ What follows is a long panegyric on ecclesial typology, the definition of which must

be guided by the dogma of the “Real Presence”:

He [the Protestant architect] will have difficulty to accomplish his mission of designing a church that fosters piety among the faithful. Lacking faith, he will have to vigorously imagine that Our Lord is genuinely present, God and Man, Body and Soul, in the tabernacle, that this tabernacle is the heart, not of the sanctuary alone, but of the entire chapel. His design of its architecture will have to emanate from this main principle, so that upon entering the chapel, one is struck by the view of the altar and the tabernacle, which are its centre, and feel compelled to bow down in worship; so that nothing during the service might divert the devotees’ attention from the sacrifice being paid at the altar . . .²⁰

The argument—still frequently made to affirm the sacred nature of a Roman Catholic place of worship and hence to

exclude its shared use—is a credo of the ultramontane ideology which, since the Counter Reformation, emerges every time the Roman Catholic Church feels that there is a threat to its monopoly. In 1907, the same orthodoxy that motivated architect Regnault in 1905 again inspired Father Dagnaud to authorize the construction of a chapel for the Collège de Caraquet, a Eudist foundation in New Brunswick. Arthur Regnault was invited to offer his advice to the Superior of the college as to the construction of this “architectural jewel [which] once completed . . . will resemble the great cathedrals of the Middle Ages.”²¹ In 1915, a fire unfortunately destroyed the college and its famous chapel, of which but a few old photographs remain to attest to their quality (fig. 15).

The architect’s correspondence on the subject of the Halifax chapel, demolished in 1970, nevertheless sheds light on how Arthur Regnault intervened from a distance: he commented on drawings and sketches that were sent to him, and sent back a number of drawings to clarify his opinion.

I mused over your chapel upon reading your last letter, and although it is putting the cart before the horse to look for a plan before there is a program, I took pleasure in exploring set-ups for a chapel to hold 80 seminarians, their professors, and the public, with the assumption that the seminarians would be placed facing the altar. I doubt this sketch would be of any use to you; let it attest at the very least to the natural interest that I hold for your work.²²

He mainly sent numerous “reference models”: photographs and postcards of churches and chapels in Brittany that he found of interest. Among others, Regnault mentioned models such as “St. Martin’s Chapel . . . , the interior of

Pléchâtel and St. Enogat . . . , the exterior of the high school chapel in Tinténiac, St. Sauveur in Rennes, Toussaint, Vieux St. Étienne, and the Carmes Chapel."²³

The chapel in Halifax was built to plans by the diocesan architect, Charles W. West, to whom Arthur Regnault offered, through other Eudists, some very specific advice, relying on the experience he had acquired on Breton construction sites:

I looked at the sketch for your new chapel with great interest and am convinced that it will be very practical, especially if the seminarians' choir is on the same level as the sacristy and vestibule, and the floor of the seminary.

If I were to make one criticism, it would be concerning your positioning of the altar of the main chapels; I would not hesitate to place it parallel to the others (against the vestibule), in accordance with tradition throughout the Middle Ages and with the dimensions of the chapel (14 feet by 18). There is sufficient room for it next to the altar.

Your vestibule (14 feet by 25) is fairly large, but it will probably serve as an ambulatory, despite the closeness of the choir.

It is in the decoration of the chapel that the architect must fully deploy his talent; this is in fact essential, for the perspective on this background is the entire chapel. The task will be daunting, and it will be difficult for him to make good use of the large, more than 13-foot-wide cants of the apse, to ensure that they are not more flat or poor than the rest of the chapel, particularly if I succeeded in convincing him that the lighting of the altar should always be lateral and that nothing should distract the devotees from keeping their eyes on the priest and the tabernacle.

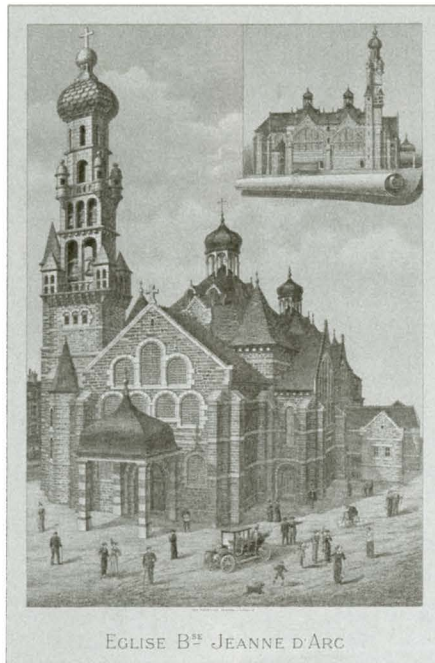


FIG. 16. ENGRAVED PRESENTATION DRAWING, SAINTE-JEANNE-D'ARC'S CHURCH, RENNES. | DEPARTMENTAL ARCHIVES, ILLE-ET-VILAINE, RENNES.

I do not face the same challenges in my country churches; when apses in these churches are not circular or slightly elliptic, I make them polygonal with narrow cants separated by buttresses so as to be dispensed from putting any ornament, the construction itself providing the necessary design. Your architect will be all the more deserving, and I am certain, from what I know of his work, that he will admirably succeed in his task. You will find enclosed a sketch of the apse of Cesson. I made apses of this kind in almost all my 13th-century-style churches, with either one or three naves, in particular in Etreilles, Bédée, St. Aubin, St. Aubigné, Châteaubourg, Pacé, Gosne, and Langon. In the Épiniac church (15th-century style) of which you see the interior, as well as in those in Acigné and Châtilion-en-Vendelais (same style), I have only two cants, but they are smaller than the background against which the altar sits, and very receding, in such a way as to make their windows invisible to the public and to



FIG. 17. SAINTE-JEANNE-D'ARC'S CHURCH, RENNES, FAÇADE TO THE PLANS OF ARTHUR REGNAULT, 1915; BELL TOWER BY HYACINTHE-MARIE PERRIN, 1953. | LUC NIPPEN.

better illuminate the altar.²⁴

Even though long gone, the Halifax and Caraquet chapels are precious to us; they speak to the kind of architectural practice Arthur Regnault projected from a distance to support the Eudists' wish to etch coherent and meaningful monuments on their mission land. The meticulous architecture of the chapels can further be explained by the fact that they were used as places of theological training of new French Acadian priests.

LATE CAREER: SAINT-CŒUR-DE-MARIE'S CHURCH IN QUÉBEC CITY

Pierre-Marie Dagnaud ended his career in the Québec City area. He opened a first parish house in Lévis in 1911 and, in 1918, became the founding pastor of the Saint-Cœur-de-Marie parish.²⁵ The following year, with a view to building the

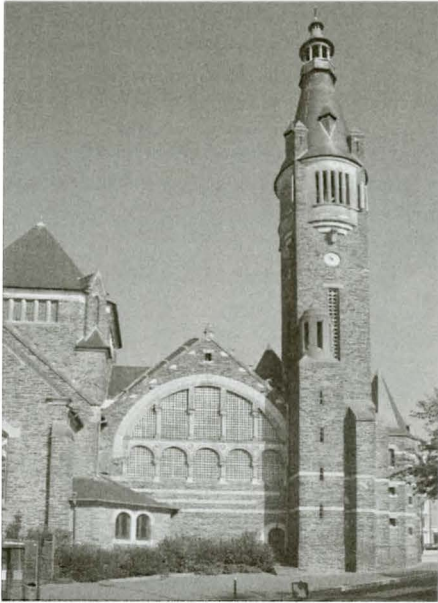


FIG. 18. SAINTE-JEANNE-D'ARC'S CHURCH, RENNES, BAY OF THE NAVE ERECTED IN 1915 TO THE PLANS OF ARTHUR REGNAULT. | LUC NOPPEN

new parish church, he called on Arthur Regnault once again.²⁶ As previously, there is no correspondence or plans by the architect from Rennes in the parish archives. Nevertheless, Regnault's intervention was clearly confirmed in a publication released in March 1921 for the inauguration of the new church. Jean-Thomas Nadeau, a priest from the diocese of Québec and respected architecture critic, published a paper in the parish bulletin in which he described the origins of the project, revealing the identity of the source from Rennes:

In the meantime, the Pastor [Eudist Pierre-Marie Dagnaud] asked a Breton architect, Mr. Arthur Regnault, who had dedicated his long life to building churches, to draw up a plan that combines sobriety and beauty. At the time, the architect was building a church dedicated to Saint Jeanne d'Arc in Rennes. With kindness, for which we are deeply grateful, he offered us his plan, leaving us free to adapt it to the conditions of the parish and the country.²⁷

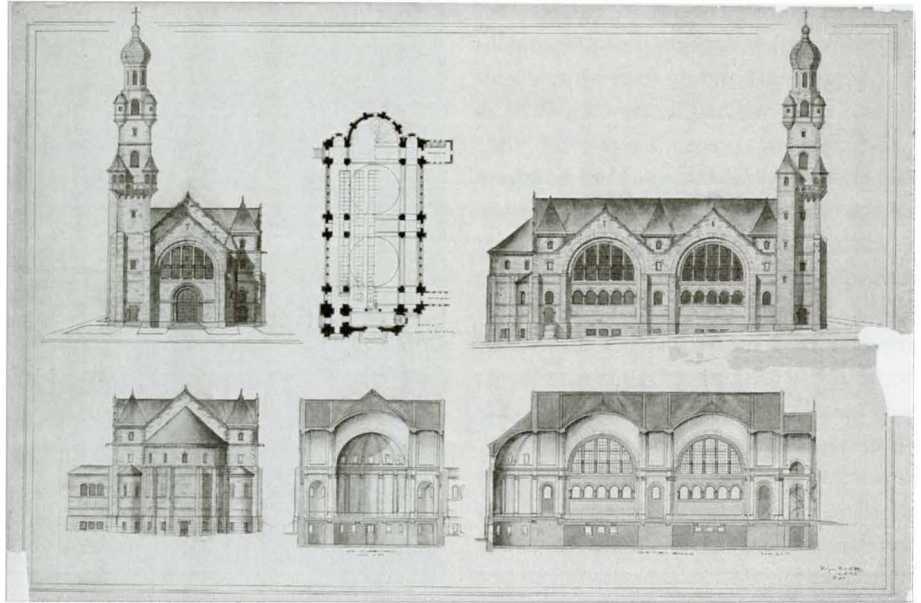


FIG. 19. SAINT-CŒUR-DE-MARIE'S CHURCH, QUÉBEC, ARCHITECT LUDGER ROBITAILLE, 1918, GENERAL PLANS. | BIBLIOTHÈQUE ET ARCHIVES NATIONALES DU QUÉBEC, CENTRE D'ARCHIVES DE QUÉBEC

In the Arthur Regnault Fonds in Rennes, held at the Departmental Archives of Ille-et-Vilaine, there is no trace of this collaboration in Acadia; and there is no set of plans for the Sainte-Jeanne-d'Arc Church in Rennes either. Only recently, the Archives in Rennes found an engraved presentation drawing of this Church (figs. 16-18). Would it be because, according to a well-preserved legend in the Regnault family, "the architect made a gift of his plans for the Sainte-Jeanne-d'Arc Church in Rennes to a Canadian priest and the church was built in Québec," as Jean-François Loyer once told me? Be that as it may, Pierre-Marie Dagnaud was less than eager to reveal his sources whenever he had an opportunity to praise his church, leaving Arthur Regnault in the shadow, in Québec City as elsewhere.

To make sense of this silence, the situation prevailing at the time must be taken into consideration. The arrival in Québec and Acadia of large numbers of French

monks and priests was not unanimously accepted. They were not welcomed any more enthusiastically by the local secular clergy—who saw in the arrival of powerful intellectuals a threat to their control over the population and institutions—than they were by French Canadians who had difficulty understanding the vernacular and lifestyle of the French, so unlike those of North Americans.²⁸ To the general unease at the beginning of the century the discomfort felt by local architects must be added. As happy as they were to find inspiration in new models, they were just as unwilling to acknowledge its source.

In Québec City, the conception of the Saint-Cœur-de-Marie Church (figs. 19-22) is credited to a local architect, Ludger Robitaille (1885-1946). As mentioned in Nadeau's 1921 parish bulletin, Dagnaud adapted the Rennes project "to the conditions of the parish and the country." Thus, it is the Québec City architect, a recent graduate of the École polytechnique



FIG. 20-21-22. SAINT-CŒUR-DE-MARIE'S CHURCH, QUÉBEC, BUILT 1919-1921 TO THE PLANS OF ARCHITECT LUDGER ROBITAILLE; ARTHUR REGNAULT, CONSULTING ARCHITECT; VIEWS OF EXTERIOR IN 2011. | LUC NOPPEN

de Montréal (1912), who produced the construction plans; he “translated” the Rennes project, adapting it to the site, to the needs of the parish and, to a certain extent, to the local construction practices.²⁹ As Arthur Regnault had planned for the Sainte-Jeanne-d’Arc Church in Rennes, the nave of the Saint-Cœur-de-Marie Church is formed by two domes supported by pendentives (figs. 23-26). Both Pastor Dagnaud and Abbot Jean-Thomas Nadeau, the theoretician of the diocese, recognized in it the model of churches with a line of cupolas from the west of France (eleventh and twelfth centuries), themselves inspired by Roman and Byzantine architecture.³⁰

The church, situated on Grande Allée in Québec City, is larger than the one that

had been planned for Rennes;³¹ it measures 49.5 by 22.5 metres and its vast nave is closed by an apse in the shape of a quarter-sphere. While the architect Robitaille would have liked to build it in concrete—the concrete frame supporting the two vaults—Pastor Dagnaud preferred a more traditional structure: the walls consist of granite blocks, doubled on the inside with terra-cotta over an interstitial space of rough concrete (fig. 27). Even the tall bell tower is built in the same way, with no frame. Due to the use of methods that were unknown in Québec, where at the time all churches were built with steel or concrete frames, the construction suffered some delays and significant cost overruns. It was necessary, for example, to install the roof structure and roofing

to ensure protection from weather conditions before masons from New York could start building the vaults. Nevertheless, there was unanimous high praise, especially for the vault, which acquired instant fame in Québec City.³²

The vault is really worth seeing. Aside from the double arcs, it is made of three layers of brick, with a thick layer of cement in between. The two outer layers are red brick and the inside layer, white brick. The latter forms the visible part of the vault, and as the firing process produced a wide range of tones in white brick, ranging from mat white to bright red, the result is a remarkable wealth of colours. One side of the white brick is ribbed; a skilful play of light is achieved by alternating the two sides, for an even greater display of beauty.³³

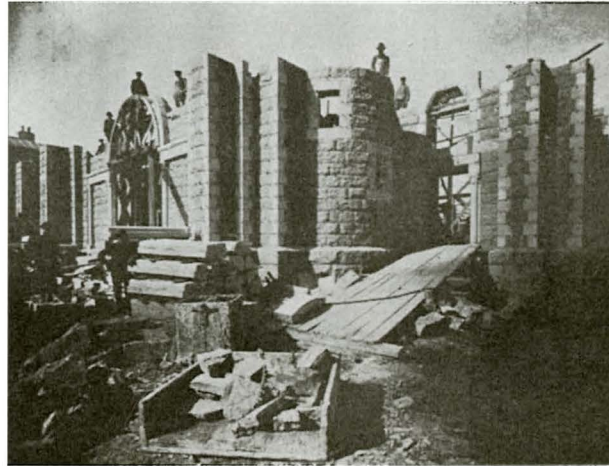


FIG. 23-24-25-26. SAINT-CŒUR-DE-MARIE'S CHURCH, QUÉBEC, BUILT 1919-1921 TO THE PLANS OF ARCHITECT LUDGER ROBITAILLE; ARTHUR REGNAULT, CONSULTING ARCHITECT; VIEWS OF INTERIOR IN 1971. | LUC NOPPEN

The collective imagination of Quebecers has been marked above all by the tower and steeple of the Saint-Cœur-de-Marie Church, generating likewise the most eccentric interpretations. Some one hundred and seventy feet tall, rising atop the highest point of the city, this steeple flanked with bartizans and topped by an onion dome is unrivalled in the province of Québec (figs. 28-30). Once again, it constitutes the formal trademark of Arthur Regnault, who had reviewed ancient Breton steeples (seventeenth and eighteenth centuries) and blended their style with the Roman-Byzantine exemplars in a number of parishes of Ille-et-Vilaine: the structures of the churches of

Saint-Pierre in Corps-Nuds (1881) (fig. 31), Saint-Senoux (1896), and de la Sainte-Trinité in Moussé (1902), among others, prefigure the steeple planned for the Sainte-Jeanne-d'Arc Church in Rennes in 1915, and finally built in Québec City in 1920.

If we put aside the picturesque figure of this steeple, which remains unique in the history of religious architecture in Québec, the Saint-Cœur-de-Marie Church had a powerful impact on church construction in the diocese of Québec. In fact, while between 1905 and 1935 the diocese of Montréal adopted Beaux-Arts architecture to affirm its French Catholicism in the

metropolitan landscape, predominantly Anglophone at the time, in Québec City, where the Anglophone threat was less perceptible, the diocese embraced the repertoires of neo-Roman and Roman-Byzantine architecture, whose symbolism more readily evokes early Christianity. The bare fact that the Dagnaud-Regnault tandem had such influence on the course of events is an indication of the significance of their architectural work in Canada.

ENDANGERED CHURCHES

Retracing Father Dagnaud step by step to understand the manner in which he used his French "pen pal" to, as it were,

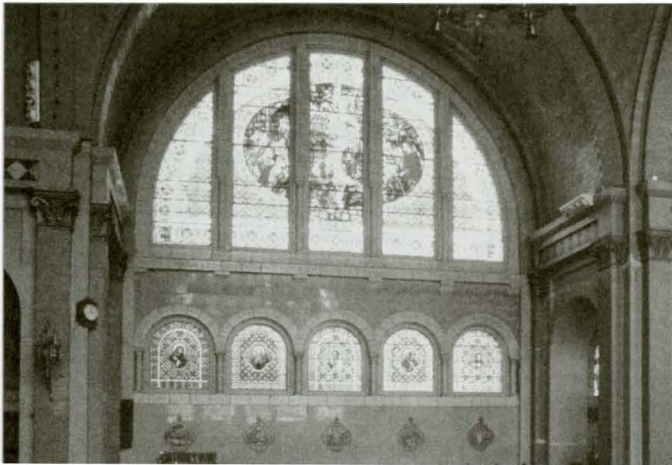


FIG. 27. SAINT-CŒUR-DE-MARIE'S CHURCH, QUÉBEC, UNDER CONSTRUCTION IN 1919. | PHOTO FROM DAGNAUD, PIERRE-MARIE, 1928, *LA PAROISSE DU SAINT-CŒUR DE MARIE. DU BERCEAU À SES DIX ANS*, QUÉBEC, IMPRIMERIE LAFLAMME, P. 36.

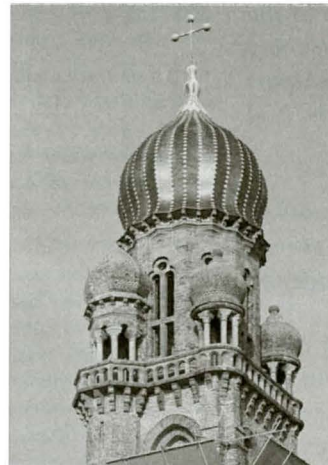


FIG. 31. SAINT-PIERRE'S CHURCH, CORPS-NUDS, ERECTED 1881-1890 TO THE PLANS OF ARCHITECT ARTHUR REGNAULT. | LUC NOPPEN.

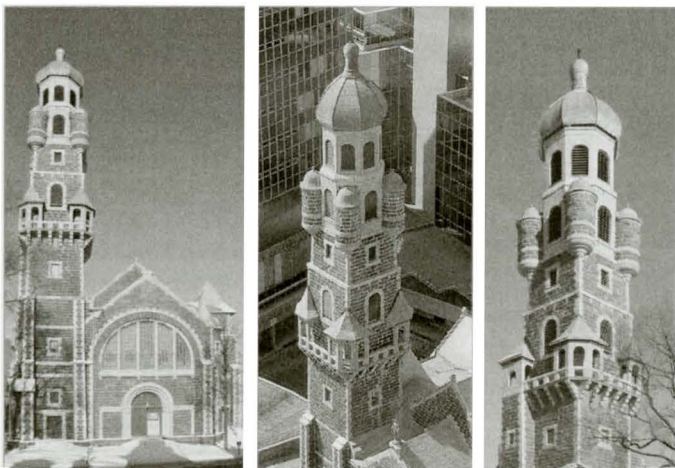


FIG. 28-29-30. SAINT-CŒUR-DE-MARIE'S CHURCH, QUÉBEC, FAÇADE AND STEEPLE IN 2011. | LUC NOPPEN



FIG. 32. SAINT-CŒUR-DE-MARIE'S CHURCH, QUÉBEC, IN ITS NEIGHBOURHOOD BEARING THE SAME NAME. | PIERRE LAHOUD.

sow monuments, has helped me to understand how religious architecture in French Canada, with its churches, chapels, convents, and monasteries, is beholden to the contribution of exiled French members of religious orders, like Dagnaud, of the 1880-1930 period. A closer look reveals that the presence of a number of religious monuments that cannot be tied solely to their local environment can be explained by resorting to the services of French

architects or to these exiles' desire to evoke the houses they left behind in their native land. Furthermore, the context in France lent itself to such endeavour. In 1905, a fateful year for religious congregations in France, Arthur Regnault wrote to Father Lecourtois in response to the latter's apologies for frequent solicitations of advice: "Do not fear that you might burden me. I am disconcerted by the interruption here of all these church construction works which have been my

regular occupation and welcome every opportunity to return to it anew."³⁴

In this sense, the end of an era in France marked the start of a golden age for the French-Canadian Church with new resources in personnel as well as educational and charitable works. The wealth and variety of our cultural landscape are owed in great measure to these men, and women, it must be noted. For more than half a century they believed that they could win

over the hearts and imagination of the French of North America who lamented having been abandoned by the Eldest Daughter of the Church a hundred and fifty years earlier.

The story may not end well, however, in particular for the two churches that this article has specifically documented as the North American works of Arthur Regnault. In Québec City, the Saint-Cœur-de-Marie Church has been closed for worship since 1997; in 2001, it was sold to a developer from the United States who planned to turn it into a reception and performance hall, but whose project was rejected by the municipal government under the city's zoning by-laws. The church was recently resold to a real estate developer who plans to convert it into an apartment building. What will remain of Grande Allée's emblematic figure after such a radical transformation? It is very likely that the redevelopment project will propose to preserve only the steeple (fig. 32).

The Pointe-de-l'Église parish is in decline and is desperately seeking funding to ensure the conservation of Sainte-Marie's Church. The maintenance costs of the church largely exceed the means of the small Acadian community. More disturbing still is the fact that large wooden Acadian churches are regularly destroyed by fire. The largest, and most beautiful, has miraculously survived until now. Will we lose it just when it might finally be designated as a Canadian national historic monument and attract the indispensable support needed for its preservation?

NOTES

1. An earlier version of this essay has been published in French: Noppen, Luc, 2012, "Présence d'Arthur Regnault au Canada," in Jean-Yves Andrieux (ed.), *Arthur Regnault, architecte (1839-1932). La quintessence de l'art sacré*, Rennes, Presses universitaires de Rennes, p. 172-185.
2. On this topic, see Noppen, Luc, 2006, "Les effets de la Séparation sur l'architecture ecclésiastique au Canada-français : l'avènement d'une église bretonne en Acadie," in Jean Balcou, Georges Provost and Yvon Tranvouez (eds.), *Les Bretons et la Séparation, 1795-2005*, Rennes, Presses universitaires de Rennes, p. 201-213; and Noppen, Luc, 2006-2007, "L'église Sainte-Marie, monument du métissage de modèles bretons et des savoir-faire acadiens," *Port Acadie. Le patrimoine religieux de la Nouvelle-Écosse. Signes et paradoxes en Acadie*, nos. 10-12, p. 149-177.
3. For my research, I delved mainly into the Archives of the Eudist Fathers [APEQ] (Québec), which assemble documents from different Canadian sources.
4. The two main biographies of Father Dagnaud are Gautier, Yves, 1931, *Le Père Pierre-Marie Dagnaud, Prêtre-Eudiste*, Québec, L'Action sociale; and Babin, Basile J., 1982, *Entre le marteau et l'enclume. Pierre-Marie Dagnaud à la Pointe-de-l'Église, Nouvelle-Écosse, 1899-1908*, Charlesbourg (Québec), Maison des Eudistes.
5. On this subject, see Leblanc, René and Micheline Laliberté, 1990, *Sainte-Anne, collègue et université, 1890-1990*, Nova Scotia, Chaire d'étude en civilisation acadienne de la Nouvelle-Écosse, 1990, p. 85-87.
6. It is important to understand that diocesan authorities throughout Canada were concerned about the large number of wooden churches regularly destroyed by fire.
7. [Our translation] Quoted by Gautier, *op. cit.* : 57. Besides, we know from Dagnaud's correspondence that his father was actually a farm worker.
8. Dugas, Albert J., 2001, *Léo Jean Melanson. Pointe-de-l'Église. Une biographie anecdotique*, Pointe-de-l'Église (NS), Albert Dugas Éditeur.
9. Father Babin was the archivist of the congregation who organized the Eudist archives centre in Charlesbourg (Québec). He provided information to the pastor of La Pointe for a commemorative publication in 1980, but his volume was not published until 1982. See Babin, *op. cit.*
10. [Our translation] [Renaud Côté], 1980, *L'église Ste-Marie. 1905-1980. Pointe-de-l'Église (N.-É.)*, Pointe-de-l'Église (NS), La paroisse Sainte-Marie, p. 27-28.
11. By way of comparison, it should be noted that Notre-Dame de Montréal has a 24.4-metre-tall false vault, also built of wood.
12. Only a few monuments, designed by European architects, had reintroduced this basilica-style elevation: Christ Church (1859) and Church of the Gesù (1865), in Montréal, for example.
13. As indicated by an inscription on the interior of the church's façade.
14. Young, Carolyn A., 1994, "Dumaresq, James Charles Philip," *Dictionnaire biographique du Canada*, vol. XIII, p. 326-327.
15. To be compared to the Notre-Dame-de-la-Croix Church, built between 1863 and 1880 in Paris (Louis-Antoine Héret), as judiciously noted by Guéné, Hélène and François Loyer, 1995, *L'église, l'État et les architectes, Rennes 1870-1940*, Paris, Norma, coll. "Essais," p. 76.
16. Bonnet, Philippe, 2006, "Jacques, Jules et Henri Mellet, bâtisseurs d'églises," *Mémoires de la société d'histoire et d'archéologie de Bretagne*, t. LXXXIV, p. 407-441.
17. [Our translation] Summary of the archaeology course taught at the Rennes Seminary, followed by historical and descriptive notes on the major religious monuments of the diocese. Cited by Bonnet, Philippe, January-June 2005, "Églises du XX^e siècle en Bretagne, de la Loi de Séparation à Vatican II" (1905-1962), *Bibliothèque de l'École des Chartes*, t. 163, p. 81.

18. Founded in 1894 by Father Pierre-Marie Cochet, the seminary at first was housed in a building designed by James Charles Philip Dumasq (1840-1906). In 1905-1906, this building was considerably expanded, and a wing was added for the large chapel. This time, the Eudists retained the services of Charles Welsford West (1858-c. 1918), head architect of the Catholic diocese of Halifax.
19. [Our translation] APEQ, Letter from Arthur Regnault to Father Lecourtois, July 27, 1905.
20. *Id.*
21. [Our translation] Text from 1910, cited by Lebreton, Clarence, 1991, *Le Collège de Caraquet*, Montréal, Les Éditions du Fleuve, p. 125-126.
22. [Our translation] APEQ, Letter from Arthur Regnault to Father Lecourtois, December 15, 1905.
23. [Our translation] APEQ, Letter from Arthur Regnault to Father Lecourtois, December 11, 1905.
24. [Our translation] APEQ, Letter from Arthur Regnault to Father Lecourtois, January 19, 1906.
25. He left the Saint-Cœur-de-Marie parish in 1927 and went back to Brittany the following year; he died in Plancoët, at the Eudists residence of La Corbinais, on July 27, 1930.
26. Noppen, Luc, 1996, "Église Saint-Cœur-de-Marie," in Luc Noppen and Lucie K. Morisset, *Art et architecture des Églises à Québec. Foi et Patrie*, Québec, Les Publications du Québec / Ville de Québec, p. 121-123.
27. [Our translation] Nadeau, Jean-Thomas, 1921, *Le Saint-Cœur-de-Marie* (parish bulletin), March 1, no. 2, p. 6.
28. Soon appeared the colloquial expression, still in use today, "*les maudits Français*" (the damn French).
29. It can be noted that the general plans, annexed to the construction contract, were rather cursory. Drawings illustrating certain construction details were however done with considerable precision.
30. If Arthur Regnault was consulted concerning the type of vaulting, he very likely approved of it; stylistically speaking, the coherence of the monument was enhanced as a result of this choice.
31. The Sainte-Jeanne d'Arc Church was partially built in 1915 and completed in 1953 to plans by Hyacinthe-Marie Perrin.
32. The vault of the church is built of bricks, in an *opus reticulum* layout, that is, a Roman-style herringbone pattern. Since the technique was unknown in Québec, Father Dagnaud invited Rafael Gustavino, the New York contractor and renowned builder of the Ellis Island Immigration Hall, to carry out the work. The Gustavino family immigrated to the United States from Catalonia in 1881 and imported this venerable technique, known to the Muslims.
33. [Our translation] Dagnaud, Pierre-Marie, 1928, *La paroisse du Saint Cœur de Marie. Du berceau à ses dix ans*, Québec, Imprimerie Laflamme, p. 42.
34. [Our translation] APEQ, Letter addressed by Arthur Regnault to Father Lecourtois, December 11, 1905.