

Comptes rendus — Book Reviews

CORNELIUS J. JAENEN. — *The Role of the Church in New France*. The Frontenac Library. Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 1976.

It is a measure of the progress of Canadian historiography that just one decade after H.H. Walsh gave us his English version of New France's ecclesiastical history (*The Church in the French Era*, 1966) drawn so heavily from the traditional institutional approach enshrined by Gosselin, we should be offered by a lay historian a modern and critical account of the total range of religion's influence in the making of New France.

Jaenen's small but excellent paperback volume is destined to become the standard reference of all students in this area of Canadian history for the next generation. Other scholars may increase, polish or refine our knowledge of the subject but for amateur or professional alike this volume will provide the base-map and the sign-posts for future studies. Solidly researched from primary sources, lucidly written and rationally organized, this book is a model of scholarship that goes light-years beyond the usual diet of regurgitated pap and platitudes dished out to students of Canadian history.

Jaenen has organized this work into two parts, the first dealing exclusively with the French *mission civilisatrice* to the Amerindians, the second with the religious life of Frenchmen in a colonial setting. Naturally the first section is the shorter, filling only a quarter of the book, but that part will serve as an introduction to the author's prize-winning study of European-Amerindian relations, *Friend and Foe*, which appeared almost simultaneously with this smaller volume. The real heart of this latter volume is his thematic approach in four chapters — political life, economic life, public welfare, and manners and morals — to the role of religion during the century that New France was under royal government.

Much of the material regarding influences on and by colonial political life will be known to most students, but Jaenen has provided new lights and clear explanations of many more obscure events such as the chaos surrounding the funeral of Bishop Saint-Vallier. His interpretation of the church's place in the economy of New France lays to rest several of the hoarier clichés about fur-trading clerics, the rationalizing of the brandy trade, and the church as the king's largest tenant in New France. The chapter on the religious motivation and organization of public welfare is perforce an abbreviated sketch of one of the brightest and most enduring functions of the Catholic church in Canada's growth, yet it provides a perceptive analysis of the major areas of such activity.

The most interesting — and probably the most controversial — chapter is undoubtedly that on manners and morals. The author has marshalled an incredible array of evidence and produces what is in this reviewer's opinion a balanced picture of a society that met attempts at social control by the church with its own band of individualism and even anti-intellectualism. This portrait is a healthy corrective to two unrealistic and opposing views popularly inherited from mid-Victorian romanticism, one of which describes New France as the epitome of piety, the other as a priest-ridden and repressed society, an opinion fostered by Parkman and avidly espoused by sectarian partisans in the past century. Yet at this point one word of caution might be offered, to the effect that more detailed analysis of the social structure in New France may add still more to our under-

standing of folk religion in the colony, as comparative studies of witchcraft have suggested. With this sole caveat, however, Jaenen's book must be praised as an outstanding and most welcome addition to our meagre but growing knowledge of Canadian religious history.

John S. MOIR,
Scarborough College, University of Toronto.

* * *

CAMERON NISH. *François-Étienne Cugnet, 1719-1751: entrepreneur et entreprises en Nouvelle-France*. Collection Histoire économique et sociale du Canada français, Fides: Montréal, 1975.

In 1719, François-Étienne Cugnet arrived in Canada, where until his death in 1751 he remained a prominent figure in both governmental administration and business. He had come to the colony as administrator of the *Domaine d'Occident*, a position that he retained by becoming a civil servant when this *ferme* was reunited to the *Domaine du Roi* in 1732. Son of an academic lawyer, himself "avocat au Parlement de Paris", Cugnet also became a member of the *Conseil supérieur* in 1730 and first councillor in 1733. He is remembered particularly for his involvement with the *Forges de Saint Maurice*, being manager of the company exploiting this resource from 1737 to 1741. Cugnet also was lessee of the *Postes du Roi* from 1736 to 1745. After a spectacular bankruptcy largely related to the failure of the *Forges*, he appears — according to Professor Nish's showing — to have rebuilt his fortune and died leaving an estate valued at 135,752 livres 12 sols net, making him a very rich colonial indeed. Clearly this was a man of considerable importance; and Professor Nish, who has been interested in Cugnet for some time and has published a host of documents on his bankruptcy, now presents us with Cugnet's first book-length, business biography.

Nish outlines briefly Cugnet's role as administrator and councillor, but concentrates on his subject's business activities. The *Forges* are given pride of place, with five chapters covering their history from the earliest notice of iron ore deposits in 1541, through the *Francheville* and Cugnet companies and Cugnet's bankruptcy down to the end of 1743, after which time the *Forges* became the property of the Crown. There are also chapters on Cugnet's lease of the *Tadoussac* trade and on his character and the significance of his career.

The narrative of the early history of the *Forges* is clear, but the author lets pass the opportunities for comment and analysis. Why was the Anglo-American style bloomery forge set aside in favour of more complex technology? What does the author think of Vézin's plans? Were the financial arrangements sound? Why was there such a shocking record of blunders: collapsing buildings, ill-chosen sites, inadequate water to turn the mills? Were the large expenses incurred reasonable? Can anything concrete be said about the entrepreneurial talent and knowledge demonstrated in the management of the *Forges*?

The very important chapter on Cugnet's bankruptcy contains many more unanswered questions. When the company's financial problems became hopeless, members attempted to resign; Hocquart sensibly stopped them. But could members extricate themselves from the financial problems of what appears to have been — but we are not told — a *société générale*? How could Cugnet's partners escape the *Forges*' creditors, considering that they fell under the rule of joint and several liability? Or did they escape? Was the company's largest block of debt, which