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Marking Memory

Heritage Work and Devotional Labor at Quebec's Croix de Chemin

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Our consciousness is shaped by a sense that everything is over and done with. . . . Memory is constantly on our lips because it no longer exists.

—PIERRE NORA, *REALMS OF MEMORY*

The cross is a symbol of history, it's our past. It's also a sign of vitality. When the wayside crosses are redone, are beautiful, are renovated, that says there are still Catholics here.

—RAYMONDE PROULX, AGE SIXTY-TWO, CROSS CARETAKER, SAINTE-GERTRUDE-DE-MANNEVILLE

Memory and tradition are hardly central theoretical issues in the anthropology of Christianity. It is, after all, a field that has coalesced around ascendant and newly emerging forms of evangelical or charismatic Protestantism. This is certainly true in studies of US Christianity, where major foci include language ideology and Bible reading, the experience of being born again and evangelism, and political and social activism.[1] From the vantage point of Quebec, however, the scholarship looks very different. Sociologists and anthropologists working in this historic center of North American Catholicism regularly examine collective memory and the decline of institutional religious authority. Their work draws on a robust transatlantic discussion following the revival of Maurice Halbwachs's work by French thinkers, such as historian Pierre Nora and sociologist Danièle Hervieu-Léger.

Since its English translation in 2000, Hervieu-Léger's *Religion as a Chain of Memory* has stoked interest in Christian memory, especially in Europe.[2] It has also been criticized for its inherent Catholic bias.[3] Here *Chain of Memory* is a useful starting point precisely for that reason: its exploration of religious transmission and authoritative tradition highlights Catholic concerns too often sidelined in anthropologies of

North American Christianity. At the same time, drawing inspiration from the recent turn to more human-centered approaches in studies of secularism, I bring an ethnographic sensibility to bear on Hervieu-Léger's largely theoretical paradigm.[4] How is collective religious memory lived, felt, and talked about in rural Quebec?

This question is essential with regard to the *croix de chemin*—large devotional crosses planted across rural Quebec. These wayside crosses are handmade by local people, stand about fifteen to twenty feet high, and are situated on roadsides. They are often made of wood, painted white, and decorated with Catholic iconography based on the Passion. Traditionally, the crosses were built to commemorate an event, fulfill a vow (*promesse*), ask for protection, or provide a gathering place if the parish church was far away. Although scholars have repeatedly predicted their imminent demise, about 80 percent of the three thousand crosses surveyed forty years ago still remain, cared for by the rural people who live nearby.[5]

This chapter knits together the perspective of cross caretakers with that of ethnologists by comparing two interlocking *lieux de mémoire:* twenty-four months of intermittent fieldwork (2012–14) with contemporary caretakers and a survey of the archive amassed by ethnologist Jean Simard, principal investigator of a major government-funded inventory of the crosses in the 1970s and 1980s.[6] Both sites are emic, in that they are produced by and for French Canadians, and each one assumes that a cohesive national identity rests in part on promoting the rural past. Yet these perspectives also operate in a context that is "braided,"[7] where ethnologists and caretakers concur and diverge. Heritage professionals, including scholars, repeatedly imply that Catholicism is "over and done with," to quote Pierre Nora above, and that places of popular devotion have thus become secularized sites of national heritage.[8] Caretakers, by contrast, view the crosses as both patrimonial *and* still-active objects of devotional labor. As practicing Catholics, they maintain them in order to express and promote a relationship with God.

I explore these ideas through three key factors particularly salient to a Catholic conception of memory, drawn loosely from Hervieu-Léger's theoretical paradigm and Simard's body of work: perspectives on temporality, the role of institutions, and the rise of individual consciousness. Ultimately, I trace how Quebecois ethnologists and caretakers both lay claim to certain kinds of modernity—secular and Catholic—in the name of collective continuity.[9]

CATHOLIC QUEBEC IN A SEASON OF CHANGE

Halbwachs's great insight was that collective memories, even religious ones, never merely preserve the past—they establish identity in the present.[10] In *Chain of Memory,* Hervieu-Léger extends this idea as a rejoinder to the secularization thesis, a reigning sociological theory at the time. She argues that religion is a creative force that confers transcendent authority on the past in order to assure present

meaning and future continuity. Drawing on Halbwachs's complementary forms of Catholic memory—the theological and the mystical—she posits that all religions rely on a central dialectic between the symbolic evocation of a chain of memory in an institutionalized liturgy and its actualization in a community's shared beliefs and practices. Her overarching definition of religion thus contains three symbiotic components: beliefs (individual and collective), tradition (the chain linking beliefs to collective memory), and institutional structures. Her conclusion is that modernity—or more precisely, the rise of a neoliberal state in France—promoted individualism and eviscerated institutional authority, including the rural "parish civilization" essential to Catholic memory.[11] The result, she opines, was that the chain was broken, precipitating religious crisis.

This view of history is echoed—arguably amplified—in Quebec, where a similar process of modernization was condensed into an intense period of change. In the 1960s, a "Quiet Revolution" swept the province, leading to vast political restructuring, economic modernization, social transformation, and rapid unchurching. The Catholic Church was largely divested of its previously central role in education and social services. Monthly mass attendance fell from 88 percent in the mid-1960s to under 20 percent today.[12] This revolution, though popularly perceived to be at odds with Catholicism, paralleled church-led modernizations spurred by the Second Vatican Council.[13] Among other things, the Quebec bishops exhorted the faithful to a deeper understanding of "true" Christianity, encouraged greater lay participation during Mass, and strongly discouraged many devotional "superstitions" of the past.[14]

In the midst of these societal upheavals, Jean Simard, a young ethnologist from Quebec City, was hired at Laval University. Simard had completed his doctoral training in mid-1960s France while the secularization thesis reigned supreme. He viewed modernity and religion as fundamentally incompatible, yet also developed a deep respect for Catholic devotional artifacts, which he viewed as popular art. Before securing a professorate in 1972, he worked at Quebec's Ministère de la culture et des communications on inventories of national heritage objects. At Laval, Simard honed a body of work based on the presupposition that culturally homogeneous people (French Canadians) inhabit definable territories (Quebec). In other words, Simard's ethnology reified an idea that other anthropologists, on the cusp of a turn to transnationalism, were in the very process of deconstructing.[15]

Simard was thus part of a trend that anthropologists of Christianity have only begun to explore: elites' conscious assimilation of religious heritage to shape emerging national identities in sites as diverse as South Africa, Poland, Korea, Brazil, and Japan.[16] Birgit Meyer's work on Ghana is especially helpful, since it delineates a historical trajectory similar to Quebec's: beginning in the late 1950s, state-led initiatives defined the modern nation by specifically reappropriating as heritage those religious traditions deemed irrational or embarrassing.[17] While "witchcraft" and "juju" are more fraught in Ghana than pre–Vatican II Catholi-

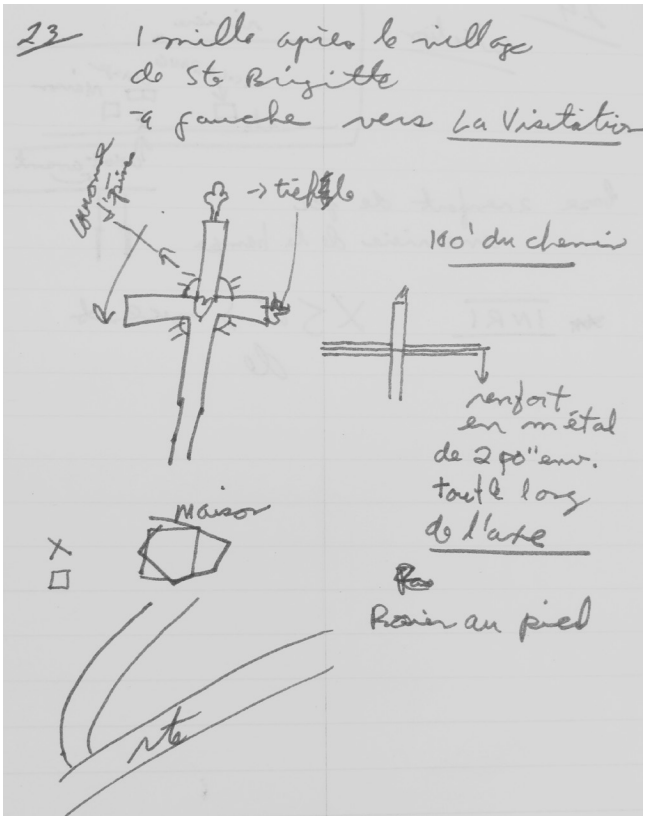

FIGURE 10.1. Page from one of the notebooks compiled by Jean Simard's students during the wayside cross survey, ca. 1975. Folder E/05533, Fonds Jean Simard (F1081), Archives de folklore et éthnologie, Université Laval. Author's collection.

cism is in Quebec, popular devotions were nevertheless viewed by Quebecois elites as problematic vestiges of the past. It was within this charged political, religious, and scholarly atmosphere that Simard's wayside cross inventory emerged.

LES ÎLES BIZARD AND JÉSUS

In June 1972, three university students, Nicole, Louise, and Luce, alighted on the islands of Bizard and Jésus. Their young professor, Jean Simard, had tasked them with conducting the inaugural survey of Quebec's wayside crosses in preparation for a seminar titled "Traditional Ethnography." Armed with fifty-cent notebooks and cameras, they fanned out across the islands.

The seminar in question was based on ethnology and folklore studies, distinct branches of anthropology in Quebec that emerged under Marius Barbeau, the most prominent early Canadian anthropologist. In 1911, Barbeau joined the Canadian Geological Survey under Franz Boas's protégé Edward Sapir to catalog the presumed last remaining specimens of "authentic" aboriginal culture.[18] In 1914, with Boas's encouragement, Barbeau also began to gather French Canadian songs and stories, leading to the creation of Quebecois *ethnologie*. His construction of the field relied on a few key assumptions, which he transmitted to his student Luc Lacourcière, who mentored Simard. First, Barbeau was convinced that French Canadian "peasants" lacked the inspiration to create; their value lay in how they faithfully transmitted an oral culture from medieval France. Second, he incorporated the strong antimodernist bent that colored his work with aboriginals: modern, commercial life ("hot-dog stands and coca-cola") was destroying an authentic French Canadian "essence."[19] It was up to ethnologists to preserve its traces as it disappeared.

Simard inherited these concerns but was also aware of nascent European programs to protect religious *patrimoine*. In 1972, the same year his students began their survey, UNESCO delivered its Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage. Closer to home, Quebec's nationalist government had begun to actively promote folklore in order to reinforce a shared identity.[20] Collaborating with his former colleagues at the Ministry of Culture, Simard adopted a model then *en vogue* in Quebecois sociology of religion: sending out mobile teams of scholars and students to conduct massive surveys of rural areas.[21] Their task was to identify which wayside crosses constituted a "national treasure" that qualified for government protection.

Simard chose the islands of Bizard and Jésus as the trial site for two reasons: Barbeau had surveyed the crosses there exactly fifty years earlier, and now the area was undergoing rapid suburbanization. Places that had been rural farms just five years before were filled with tract housing and flanked by highways. When Nicole, Louise, and Luce set out, carrying Barbeau's maps and photographs, they sought to document the presumed destruction of the crosses he had catalogued in 1922. Their twenty-three-page questionnaire, designed by Simard and used for the next decade, focused almost exclusively on each cross's placement and material composition, down even to the screws. Did they have square, round, or deformed heads? The young women carefully ticked boxes beside each one.[22]

Countering their expectations, they recorded twenty-eight crosses—five *more* than Barbeau had found. However, nearly all were reconstructed or entirely new; only five crosses remained unchanged, which were the ones the researchers valued most. In those (few) sections of the survey that elicited more qualitative responses from local people, the researchers continually reiterated the loss of an original: Was this cross displaced? Did this cross replace another? Do you know of disap-

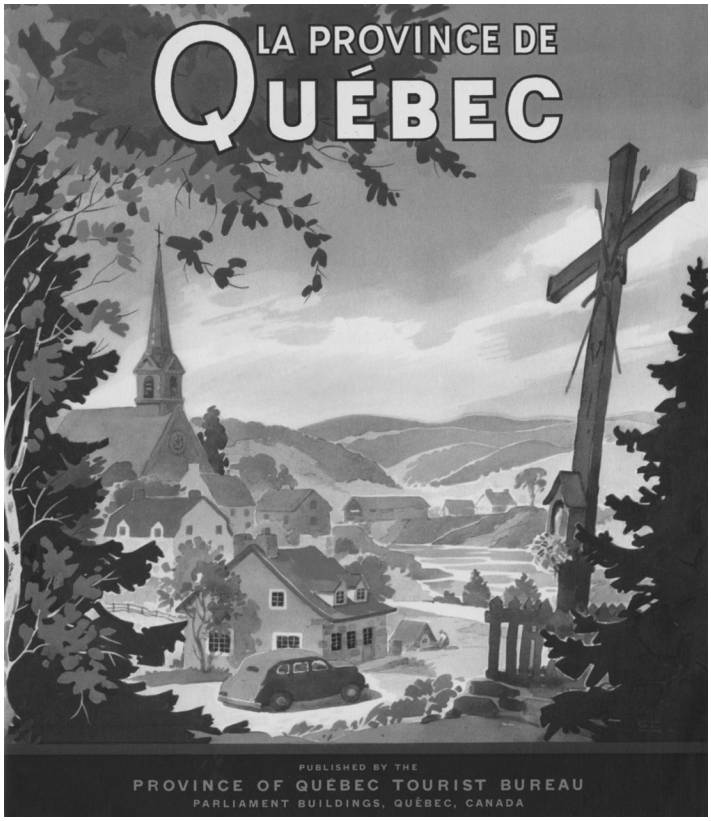

FIGURE 10.2. Brochure published by the Province of Quebec Tourist Bureau, 1935. It features a wayside cross as typical of rural Quebec.

peared crosses . . .? Despite clear evidence of active cross construction and religious adherence, the young women, echoing Simard, concluded their report by urging their urban, university-educated readers to take responsibility for the things rural people had built: the crosses are "part of the national heritage as a witness to an era, as well as a historic monument. . . . Those that still exist must be preserved, kept-up, and conserved."[23]

DIVERGENT VIEWS OF LOSS AND CHANGE

Fast-forward to today. Since the mid-1990s, thanks in part to Simard's efforts and to trends in heritage preservation worldwide religious *patrimoine* has become something of a priority for the provincial government.[24] Heritage studies also fit

seamlessly with most Quebecois scholarship on contemporary Catholicism, which continually redounds to *ce qui s'est passé,* viewing the present through the lens of the past: What has changed? What remains the same? As a result, it often reiterates Hervieu-Léger's "*paradigme de la perte*" (paradigm of loss), a mode of scholarship that clearly reflects a (post)Catholic milieu. It is colored by the memory of a church that was omnipresent in many areas of civil society, including education.[25] Work on heritage further meshes with the close collaborations most Quebecois scholars maintain with the provincial government. Although studies now problematize the role of elite "heritage makers," others still regularly champion the government's "reinvention" of the Catholic past.[26]

This latter perspective reflects how many scholars, including Simard, view modernization and secularization as a ripple effect where ideas born in intellectual centers drift outwards to engulf the rural periphery. Thus forces destructive of traditional religious culture emanate from urban centers, but so do the saving powers of ethnology: the île Bizard and île Jésus survey, according to Simard, produced almost instantaneous revitalization. Once the university students showed an interest, locals became aware of their crosses' value. When the students returned a month later, the crosses had been repainted and restored.[27]

If we reverse the lens, however, caretakers rarely, if ever, credit such experts with encouraging reconstructions. Nor do they see themselves as the passive recipients of ideas, swept up in a sea of change. Rather, they clarify that they and their predecessors have actively labored for Catholicism and as Catholics, with God's help. Wayside crosses, in fact, become the *ultimate* example of this process. I turn now to a clearer discussion of how their perspective overlaps with and diverges from that of Quebecois ethnologists, structured around three key themes in Hervieu-Léger's work.

Temporality

Time—how it passes, how it is remembered—is of the utmost importance to heritage scholars like Simard. It is also central in Hervieu-Léger's model, which underlines the essential role of rituals ("practices of anamnesis") that recall the past and thereby incorporate believers into a historical chain. Such collective remembering belongs to the "pure world of tradition," a concept she often invokes, which seems to imply a Lockean temporal mode: a linear trajectory that moves from a premodern period when traditional religion (Catholicism) was "naturally" transmitted between generations to a modern one where it is inevitably under threat.[28]

For many Quebecois scholars, the 1960s Quiet Revolution has provided a ready axis dividing these two imagined periods. Simard's inventory relied on it, since it was fundamentally an attempt to scientifically distinguish between the "traditional" and the "modern" by categorizing crosses on the basis of age, material coherence, and type of carvings. This empiricism of the traditional subsumed the

mythos of a French Canadian "essence," as per Barbeau, that was premodern, rural, and tied to the physical territory of Quebec. The crosses served as ideal metonyms for this complex of ideas, since they were handmade by local people and rooted in the ground. In Simard's "typology of significance," new crosses and the use of foreign materials (say, vinyl siding or British Columbian fir trees) were thus clearly undesirable. All twenty-five crosses that he identified as "national treasures" had elaborate wood carvings and predated 1921.[29]

Both ethnologists and caretakers connect wayside crosses to idealized memories of a rural past. Nostalgia, scholars note, is the attempt to situate oneself in a particular time and place and is thus constituted differently depending on one's social location.[30] Caretakers differ from ethnologists because for them rural Quebec is a memorialized past *and* an everyday reality. The past tense coexists with multiple cycles of destruction and care that define their agricultural environment. Each spring, crosses must be repainted and the gardens replanted. Every forty-five or so years, they become sufficiently *magané* (used up) that they must be replaced. Comparing this to generational change, Marielle Lemay, age seventy, says: "It's like an old person who dies. It's sad, but you say, well, there's an end to everything. That's just how it is . . . [and] it continues because you rebuild." Although many caretakers cherish and recreate selected decorative features from earlier crosses, they do not see their role merely as preserving and transmitting the things of the past in a way conforming to how Barbeau once viewed French Canadian oral culture. Caretakers view each renewal of a cross as a creative act.

Thus while heritage objects or heirlooms are generally valued for their singularity—the Vikings used *this* ship, my grandmother wore *that* locket—caretakers "pass down" crosses in ways that are more suggestive, defined by traces of the past. Clément Lavallière, age seventy, maintains a cross in the village of St-Janvier-de-Weedon that is typical of such creative (re)constructions. The original wood cross was erected in 1943 on a ridge above the village. By 1995, it had rotted sufficiently that five men, including Clément, decided to replace it. They maintained the size (seventeen feet), placement, and essential design but remade it in aluminum. They saved one design feature—a crest from the Marian year 1954—and reattached it. Three years later, the zinc bolts started to rust, so they ascended the ridge again. "We put in three hundred stainless steel bolts. I remember exactly because I was the one who changed them all," recalls Clément. "Now it's perfect. It will last a very long time." Then in 2002, they were given a three-hundred-pound steel corpus (Jesus's body) after a cemetery renovation. This was a major coup. "The corpus makes it very special. We're very proud of that," says Clément. Once again, they climbed the ridge, removed the cross, and added to it. They decided to paint the Christ white and found that car paint kept the rust at bay. The most recent addition, in 2004, was the initiative of a young electrician who donated neon lights "so that it would show up even more at night, be even more beautiful."[31]

FIGURE 10.3. St-Janvier-de-Weedon cross, renovated by Clément and other villagers in the Chevaliers de Colomb. Photographed in 2010. Courtesy of Monique Bellemare.

Most contemporary crosses are re-creations built on, or close to, the site of an earlier one. Yet paradoxically for heritage experts like Simard, caretakers often express a connection to this history by employing new materials—electric lights, zinc bolts, or car paint—that augment visibility and durability. At stake are contrasting notions of continuity. For heritage experts, continuity means material coherence (the *same* materials, the *same* decorations). For caretakers, it is closer to Hervieu-Léger's living "chain"—recalling the past by projecting into the future: the aluminum cross will last "a very long time." Yet Hervieu-Léger ultimately views traditional Catholicism as transformed only in ways that produce its own destruction.[32] Caretakers, on the other hand, view Catholicism as evolving, especially with

regard to expanded roles for laity, including women. At a personal level, their faith has also deepened since they were children. For caretakers, this twin progression is evidence of positive change—echoed in the improved technologies of wayside cross care.

So what does this mean for future continuity? Caretakers labor to augment a cross's durability yet usually evince little concern about whether it will be maintained when they are gone. There seem to be a few reasons why. Some caretakers emphasize the importance of belief in God rather than in the object itself. A larger number do care about the object *qua* object but are convinced that young people who seem indifferent today will naturally take over the role as they begin to head families and own property. Last, a significant number of caretakers refuse a linear view of time altogether by leaving room for something akin to Dipesh Chakrabarty's History 2, which continually interrupts the "totalizing thrusts" of capitalist/secularist history.[33] God punctuates the progressive march of time. Florence Bergeron, a seventy-three-year-old caretaker, puts it thus: "I have great confidence that the church still exists. . . . In what way will the religious reawakening happen? I don't know *how* it will happen, but [I] have faith. So we await it."

Institutionalization

Religious institutions are key nodes in Hervieu-Léger's chain. They anchor the very definition of religion, in contrast to idiosyncratic beliefs, because they transmit traditions and proffer authority. It is their failure in the modern era that has produced religious crisis. Pierre Nora's work, upon which Hervieu-Léger draws, implies a similar trajectory, mapping out how the state replaced the Catholic Church as the main site of identity formation after the French Revolution. Nora decries earlier historians who claimed to be empiricists yet actually privileged narratives that served nationalist ends. By contrast, Simard's body of work promotes collaboration between activist scholars and nationalist governments, offering significant insight into this relationship as a result.[34] What all these studies leave unexplored, however, is the way that people like the caretakers actually interact with institutional authorities.

Most caretakers self-identify as "practicing" Catholics; 83 percent attend Mass at least once a month. Nevertheless, they are ambivalent about the institutional church. Like many North Americans, they no longer conceive of it as infallible or impregnable, and they refer to the amalgamation of parishes, the defection of priests and nuns, and the sex abuse scandals as proof. Yet such feelings are never as final or all-encompassing as many theories of modernity imply. In large part this speaks to how, *contra* Hervieu-Léger, modernity in rural Quebec is not defined by "specialized circles of memory" where people clearly distinguish between family memory, religious memory, national memory, and so on.[35] Rather, caretakers describe a series of nested institutions, including church, nation, village, *rang,* and

FIGURE 10.4. Wayside cross in Saint-Télesphore, the home of Jean Robert. Typical of traditional wayside crosses, it is made of wood, painted white, and planted directly in the ground. Decorative instruments of the Passion include the ladder, lance, rooster, pincers, hammer, and stylized sacred heart. Photographed in 2014. Courtesy of Monique Bellemare.

family—all of which order the world and thus connect to God.[36] One result is that they often use "religious heritage" and "religion" nearly interchangeably. Jean Robert, a fifty-eight-year-old caretaker in the village of Saint-Télesphore, is a good example. The crosses, he told me, "are part of the *patrimoine religieux* [religious heritage]. That's undeniable." He continued: "They were planted in this region a hundred years ago and [before that] by [French explorer] Jacques Cartier . . . so I consider it an important element to conserve from our religious heritage. It represents, as I said, Jesus Christ crucified who came to save the world. It shows that religion, Christianity, is still present among us and that there are people who want it to continue."

The overlap between different institutions, as well as notions of religious heritage and religion, comes to the fore vividly during the celebrations held on parish anniversaries, which often incorporate wayside crosses. In 2014, Saint-François-Xavier-de-Brompton held one such *jour d'antan* (day of yore) on its 125th anniversary The villagers renewed three wayside crosses, and the parish priest, Father Guy Giroux, was invited to offer a short homily and sprinkle holy water on each one in blessing. The "pioneer families" that had originally built the crosses were honored and had their photos taken with the priest. The photos were later reprinted in the local weekly, which described a "day full of pride, emotions and remembrances still anchored to memory."[37]

In villages like Saint-François-Xavier, the same individuals head important regional families, serve on the parish *fabrique* (lay council for parish finances), and are elected to local government. For caretakers, the most salient distinction is not therefore between religious and secular institutions but between those that are far away (the Catholic Church or the Quebecois state) and those that are close by (parish priests, small businesses, municipal governments, or *fabriques*). While caretakers are split about whether church and state help or hinder their efforts, they are uniformly positive about local institutions because "everyone here is Catholic," they often say. Though most of their neighbors are no longer "practicing" (going to Mass), caretakers contend that what makes a Catholic is belief in God, participation in life cycle rituals (e.g. baptism, marriage), and celebration of Christmas and Easter. Indeed, 92 percent of French Canadians still identify as Catholics, and 91 percent baptize their children (a number that rises to 97.3 percent outside of urban Montreal). Among sixteen- to thirty-five-year-olds, the least religious group, 73 percent still believe in God.[38]

This nesting of local authority produces a kind of flexibility. Over the last twenty years caretaking patterns have shifted, but not from Catholic caretakers to secular ones, as Simard and other heritage experts assume. This shift is within interconnected local institutions—all run by believing (and usually practicing) Catholics. If the original builder is gone, *rang* neighbors may assume a cross's care. Where the parish school no longer maintains the cross, the Knights of Columbus may step in. This Catholic fraternal organization represents a particular innovation in wayside cross care. Since the mid-1990s, local chapters have started caring for hundreds of crosses across the province, including the St-Janvier cross described above.[39]

Consciousness

For Hervieu-Léger, modernity rests on a paradox. It was twentieth-century Christianity's own "subjectivization of religious experience" that degraded the chain of memory upon which religion relied.[40] The promotion of individual consciousness is thus essential to modern religiosity even as it ultimately destroys it, at least in Catholicism. To this, Nora's work adds an element of nostalgia; moderns long for

"the silence of custom" now that it is gone. Heritage scholars, like Simard, acknowledge this loss but also propose a partial solution: Quebecois historical consciousness can be developed anew by state-run programs that "reinvent" its Catholic past to serve the present.[41]

Caretakers concur with Hervieu-Léger and Nora, especially in how these scholars tie the loss of collective memory to societal and economic changes that have gutted formerly thriving rural areas. They also echo Hervieu-Léger's contention, following Halbwachs, that religious feeling is adversely affected by individualism and modern capitalism.[42] They differ, however, about the subjectivization of religious experience. Rather than breaking "the chain" of religion, caretakers view a certain kind of subjectivization as an improvement over earlier forms of Quebec Catholicism. Nicholas Girard, a sixty-two-year-old caretaker and deacon, expresses it well:

> Today when people say, "I believe" they don't say it because their neighbor is doing it. It's not a mass movement but a movement that is individual, each one chooses. And once that person chooses to say, "Yes, I believe," there is a faith within him. A faith that says, "Yes, I believe with my head. Yes, I believe with my heart. . . ." By contrast, if we think about the faith of my grandparents or great-grandparents—I'm not saying it wasn't good, my grandparents were strong believers—[but] there was a collective mentality there.

This characterization of French Canadian religious life before the 1960s is so widely believed, and has generated so much public criticism, that even caretakers who decry falling attendance at Mass do not advocate a return to the "collective mentality." As caretakers see it, wayside crosses serve an important symbolic function as a beacon of individual consciousness, now and even in their grandparents' era, since laypeople generally chose to erect them beyond the confines of the church. From a Weberian perspective, we might say that individual builders construct a moral Christian self through their labor. However, while Weber was concerned with the advent of wage labor, wayside cross devotional labor is morally significant precisely because it is voluntary; it is unrelated to wages, parish work, or even penance for sin.[43] Its sole purpose, say caretakers, lies in how each human builder seeks a direct relationship with God.

Given this fact, surprisingly few caretakers find it relevant to know why their cross was erected or even by whom. In Simard's surveys, 62 percent of respondents had no idea why the cross had been put up—though it was usually within a generation.[44] If asked today, people who care for crosses on public land often make recourse to generalities ("It was the style back then"), while those who maintain family crosses typically respond like Christian Blanchette, fifty-four, who cares for the cross on his farm, erected by his grandfather: "My grandfather was a good Catholic and very proud of his property, on the corner of the *rang* where almost

everyone passed to get into the parish. When I knew him, he went to Mass every day and took care of the church and the cemetery. . . . That's why he built it. The *real, real* reason why, the *personal* one [the vow], I don't know. I never asked."

Scholars are aware that, at a philosophical and psychological level, memory and forgetting are coconstitutive: each one forges the mechanisms that bring the other into being.[45] Yet the study of domestic objects tells us that things passed down—photos, souvenirs, mementos—are meaningful because they materialize particular stories associated with particular people. Their sentimental value is lost if no one recalls why they were kept.[46] Most crosses can be classed as domestic objects because of their association with "the ancestors." So why, for caretakers like Blanchette, does the object retain meaning even when the stories that originally impelled its construction are lost? To some degree there is overlap with Simard's approach, which sees the reason for a cross's construction as largely irrelevant to its didactic value in recalling the archetypical peasant of an idealized past. At another level, however, caretakers depart from Simard: the *fact* of the original prayer is crucial, even if the details are not.

The best way to describe caretakers' perspective may be to acknowledge, along with scholars of material culture, that people do not translate every sensation into discourse, nor do they want to.[47] Put in these terms, caretakers' refusal to trace the narrative behind a cross's construction may actually signal how for them the "real story" concerns the object's power to mediate intangible presences—then and now. As Tom Beidelmann notes of rituals in Africa, secrets are powerful in part precisely because they intimate the existence of an unknown world, where a person speaks to the gods.[48] When the contents of a prayer conversation remain private, it may reiterate the existence of these beings locked in discussion. It thus becomes less important (even irrelevant) to caretakers whether the cross was erected to fulfill a vow, to sacralize the land, or to ward off calamities. That the original prayer remains secret only intensifies the *fact of relationship* between the pious ancestor and God, which works to repudiate the notion that Catholicism is inevitably bound up in the "collective mentality" that Quebecois, including caretakers, now view with ambivalence.

MARKING MEMORY IN QUEBEC

One of the most comprehensive scholarly volumes on Quebec's religious heritage, *Le patrimoine religieux,* begins with a preface by Jocelyn Groulx, director of the Religious Heritage Council: "Unfortunately, it is clear that as the major historic and founding [religious] traditions are less practiced and less passed down, the few remaining people will not be able to adequately assure the survival of this vast [material] heritage."[49] Funded by the Ministry of Culture, the Religious Heritage Council is in many ways heir to the work of Simard and other ethnologists of

Catholic "folklore." The tone of Groulx's contribution is thus hardly surprising: it calls for government intervention, couched in a persistent refusal to see Catholicism as a still-living religion, at least for French Canadians.

I foreground the work of heritage scholars and bureaucrats in order to demonstrate how a robust anthropology of Quebecois Catholicism must encompass two *lieux de mémoire* at once: contemporary religious practice and the heritage work that seeks to reposition Catholic devotionalism vis-à-vis national identity.[50] Hervieu-Léger's *Chain of Memory* offers a helpful framework, I argue, for highlighting key issues related to this milieu, especially in how it acknowledges the multiple nodes of relationship related to collective memory and also the pull that an institutional religious past (and present) may exert.

Indeed, it requires a careful hand to trace the interaction of heritage, culture, and religion in a place where Catholicism has been so closely associated with ethnicity, yet weekly Mass attendance has dropped precipitously and "memory" is on many people's lips. My point here is that the result is not necessarily (or inevitably) "belonging without believing" in a religious tradition that does only cultural identity work.[51] Rather, Quebecois ethnologists and caretakers each lay claim to particular kinds of modernity—secular and Catholic—in the name of collective continuity. As such, their perspectives are more than sites of contestation; they are parallel and overlapping, enmeshed in shared societal, economic, and political networks.[52] Through them we see how Quebec Catholicism encompasses multiple modes of simultaneous interaction—including heritage work and devotional labor operating side by side at the very same cross.

NOTES

All translations from French are mine. I use *Quebecois* and *French Canadian* for people with French ancestry. Though outmoded in public discourse, *French Canadian* is still sometimes used in scholarship for clarification, as I use it here. I also refer to cross "caretakers," although there is no precise equivalent in French, where they are called "owners" (*propriétaires*) or the person who looks after the cross (*qui s'occupe de la croix*).

1. Surveying this literature is beyond my scope, but it includes the work of Susan Harding, Victor Crapanzano, Tanya Luhrmann, James Bielo, Jon Bialecki, and Omri Elisha. Formative debates in anthropology of Christianity about conversion as continuous or discontinuous with the past are, of course, directly concerned with religio-cultural inheritance, but the "traditional" religion in question is rarely Christianity.

2. Knobauch (2001, 527–28); Sakaranaho (2011, 135–58); Brosius and Polit (2011).

3. Geaves (2009, 19–33).

4. For more human-centered approaches to studying secularism, see, e.g., Bender and Taves (2012).

5. This estimate includes new crosses and reconstructions. It is based on my survey of locally produced books about crosses and a 2012–13 telephone study where my research assistants contacted 398 parishes, of which 199 had crosses.

6. On "lieux de mémoire," see Nora (1996, 14). I conducted intermittent fieldwork from 2012 to 2014, during which time I attended group prayers, cross benedictions, and springtime cleanups. I

directed a telephone survey (see note 5) and conducted fifty one- to two-hour interviews with caretakers, over the phone and in person, and twelve interviews with leaders in historical societies and the Chevaliers de Colomb (Knights of Columbus). I surveyed *Colombien* magazine from 1922 to 2007 and available village weeklies from 2006 to present. The archive is the Fonds Jean Simard (FJS), F1081, Archives de folklore et ethnologie, Université Laval (Quebec).

7. This idea is adapted from Orsi (2005, 9).

8. Routhier (2006a, n.p.). Admittedly, religious heritage preservation is complicated, since Quebecois clergy and female religious often worked alongside academics.

9. I use the term *secular*, but ethnologists more accurately operate in a post-Catholic context, since Catholicism's structuring traces still influence their work.

10. Halbwachs ([1941] 1992).

11. Hervieu-Léger (2000, 73, 86–87, 127, 132–35); Nora (1996, 1).

12. Bibby (2008, 161, 175).

13. Routhier (2006b). On a similar point, see Hervieu-Léger (2000, 170).

14. Gauvreau (2013, 193).

15. Appadurai (1988, 16–20); Gupta and Ferguson (1992, 6–23). The ministry was created in 1963 as part of the modernization measures noted above. Simard's scholarship predated the "transnational turn" but then continued with little variation into the 1980s and 1990s.

16. Chidester (2005); Zubrzycki (2013); Endres (2011); van de Port (2005); Albera and Eade, forthcoming). Simard pointedly does not identify as "elite," viewing his work on popular art as "the people's vengeance" against the church. Simard (1979, 2).

17. Meyer (2010c, 10).

18. Dominguez (1986); Nurse (1997, 99).

19. Barbeau (1935, 290; 1962, 9); Nurse (1997, 30, 314).

20. Handler (2011, 49).

21. Routhier (2006b, 301); Jean Simard, interview by author, May 23, 2014.

22. Nicole Genet, Luce Vermette, and Louise Decarie-Audet, "Les croix de chemin: Ile Jesus-Ile Bizard," report submitted to Jean Simard, November 5, 1972, in FJS, E/05547.

23. Ibid., 16–17; Simard (1972, 20–22).

24. Kritzman (1996, xii).

25. Hervieu-Léger (1996). Cf. Perrault (2011). On the role of the church in civil society, see Mager and Cantin (2010); Snyder and Pelletier (2011). In terms of early sociology/anthropology in particular, see Hervieu-Léger (2000, 9–22).

26. On elites, see Drouin and Richard-Bazire (2011, 1). On reinvention, see Noppen and Morrisset (2005).

27. Jean Simard, Interview by author, May 23, 2014; Joly (2008, 43); Carpentier (1981, 391); Simard (1998, 50).

28. Hervieu-Léger (2000, 124–25, 127). Locke compared time to "the length of one straight line, extended *in infinitum*."

29. Simard (1995, 7, 47).

30. K. Stewart (1992, 253–54).

31. Of fifty caretakers interviewed, only two saw their cross as *patrimoine* and explicitly not religious. Tellingly, both opted to build precise re-creations based on old photos.

32. Hervieu-Léger (2000, 111, 176).

33. Chakrabarty ([2000] 2008, 66).

34. Nora (1996, 3); Hervieu-Léger (2000, 129). Simard inherited his view from Barbeau, for whom *ethnologie* necessarily included public education to counter the moral threat posed by modernity and materialism—and, ironically, to encourage tourism.

35. Hervieu-Léger (2000, 127).

36. A *rang* is a rural grouping of houses. The term is a holdover from the seigneurial system, where rural houses are strung out along on what today is effectively a small country road. In Quebec, each *rang* had its own school, its own post office, and often its own wayside cross.

37. Côté (2014).

38. Meunier, Laniel, and Demers (2010, 92, 122).

39. There is no official estimate of the Chevaliers' involvement. Amateur historian Monique Bellemare has amassed a photographic repository of 688 contemporary crosses. Of these, 7.9 percent display the Knights' insignia. At that rate, they maintain 200 to 250 crosses province-wide. However, the number is likely much higher, since the insignia is not always displayed and since Bellemare's record may highlight crosses that are more ornate. Knights' crosses are usually undecorated.

40. Hervieu-Léger (2000, 170).

41. E.g., Noppen and Morrisset (2005); Nora (1996, 1).

42. Hervieu-Léger (2000, 128, 130–40).

43. Cf. Mayblin (2010, 110).

44. Carpentier (1981, 42).

45. Méchoulan (2008, 121).

46. S. Stewart ([1984] 2001, 150).

47. Morgan (2010, 68).

48. Beidelmann (1993). This idea connects to what scholars also note about Catholic objects (e.g., Orsi [2005, 55]).

49. Groulx (2009, n.p.).

50. Meyer (2010c).

51. Hervieu-Léger (2000, 162); Handler (2011, 48).

52. Kilde (2013, 192).